

Part 1: God Calls you to holiness

***“For I, the Lord, am your God;
and you shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy...
You shall be holy, because I am holy.”***

Leviticus 11:44-45



Where do you see yourself—and God—in the picture above? Let your heart and imagination enter into the scene. May God who has raised up Christ bless us to be witnesses to the new creation in Christ.

Pray slowly and attentively this prayer for Part 1:

“O God of love, quiet me in your presence. Help me to be aware of your life-giving energy, your Holy Spirit living within me. The Holy Spirit connects me with you, with all creation, with all who are dear to me. Bless all with your love. I make this prayer through Jesus Christ who shows me how to love.”

Remember: you are holy because God is holy. Keep this in mind! How aware are you of your own spirituality? Your spirituality is who you really are in your deepest and truest self in relation to God, other people, and all of creation.

Another way of looking at your spirituality is to see it as wholeness, your wholeness. And amazingly enough, wholeness is holiness. Holiness is wholeness lived within God's love.

In one passage (Matthew 5:48) Jesus links human holiness with God's holiness: “You must be perfect [merciful, loving, holy] as your heavenly Father is perfect [merciful, loving, holy]”. This passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount doesn't demand the impossible as it seems on first reading. How could you be as perfect as God? "Perfect" doesn't mean the personality fault of perfectionism but rather it means being most fully the person God wants you to be. You are called by these words to be as fully yourself as God is fully God.

Holiness means wholeness. If you are as fully developed a human being as possible and live within the context of God's love, you are truly yourself.

Elizabeth Johnson describes the holiness of ordinary persons in everyday life. Holiness does not mean only ethical holiness, but rather "it is a participation in the very life of God, thanks to the Spirit of God given in baptism."

"All Christians in whatever state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and thus holiness is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth." (Constitution on the Church #40)

Take a few moments to experience in your heart how God loves you and is present to you right now. Ask yourself:

- When have I encountered God today in the midst of my activities?
- How have I responded to God's loving presence today?

Psalm 84 describes how you can be at home with God. Make yourself comfortable and rest in God by reflecting on these words:

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord.
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (verses 1-3).

God's dwelling place, God's court, is where you are right now. God's dwelling place is within you--and outside you.

Look again at the picture of the sunrise, which can remind you of Easter. All of creation, both Heaven and Earth, are God's dwelling place. God is present EVERYWHERE. Reflect on God's presence for a few moments, and thank God for all of life.

Now turn your attention closer to home. Look around the room you are in, look out the window, think about your family and friends, look forward to the activity you plan for a few minutes from now. How is God present to you in this place, these persons, your plans?

In the words of a simple hymn:

"We are one with the heart of each other.
We are one with the heart of love.
We are one with the heart of creation.
We are one with God."

Review this part of this retreat, "God calls you to holiness." This call is to come closer to the God who loves you and shares divine holiness with you. Your entering into God's holiness is made possible by the GOD WHO LOVES YOU AND DELIGHTS IN YOU.

Now turn to the next part of this retreat. Part 2: Finding God in Creation. [\[insert link\]](#)

Part 2: Finding God in Creation



Look reflectively at this picture of the heavens. Marvel at the technology that makes such a photo possible and even more at the universe itself. Recent developments in all branches of science can leave us breathless as we realize the ever-expanding magnitude of creation. Let your imagination marvel in wonder at God's creation and at our human ingenuity.

"O gracious God, open our hearts and our eyes to the wonder of your presence among us. May we see the signs of your beauty within and around us. Help us to reach beyond ourselves and to give thanks for all of your creation: peoples of every nation, animals of every species, all forms of vegetation, the planets, stars, and galaxies. We pray this in union with the Incarnate Word of God."

As far back as the fifth century St. Augustine wondered at the immensity and beauty of the natural wonders. He observed: "I asked the earth, the sea and the deeps, heaven, the sun, the moon and the stars....My questioning of them was my contemplation, and their answer was their beauty" (The Confessions of St. Augustine, X, vi).

Sixteen centuries after Augustine the Earth Charter (approved in 2000 by UNESCO) challenges us to respect and care for the community of life. In the second paragraph of the Preamble we are reminded: "Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the condition essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust."

Perhaps you don't know all the intricacies of modern science or contemplate beauty as deeply as Augustine did. But you can find God in nature. You know that God is everywhere. You can find God when you are surrounded by the beauty of nature--whether looking at a glacier in Alaska, standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon, or when you stand by a lake shore or in a woods or in your own backyard.

Reflect on how these places give you an incentive to pray, experiencing God's presence:

- watching the sun play over the water, the loon dive into the wave for fish, the light pricking through the dark night sky;
- listening to the gentle breeze or the rough wind blowing through the trees;
- feeling the cool water lapping at your feet as you sit on a dock or the warmth of the sun on your face;
- smelling lilacs in the spring or the grasses along a lakeshore—or the dead fish there;
- hearing the roll of thunder or the cardinal singing in the backyard.

God frequently speaks to us through nature. Growing in appreciation of the wonder of the natural environment can help you to deepen your spirituality.

For the people of the Bible God was in the mountains and the desert, in the cool breeze and in the storms. The age-old prayers that are the psalms show how the Israelites were constantly aware of God's creation. They wondered at God's works and gave praise. The nature imagery used in the psalms describes the world as they knew it.

The poetic prayers of the psalms can help you to be more contemplative as you grow in knowing, loving, and experiencing God in creation. Take time to look up and pray some of these psalms. For instance, Psalm 8 begins with these lines: "O, Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth! You have exalted your majesty above the heavens...."

Psalm 84 opens with these words: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!"

In Psalm 148 the psalmist asks all of creation to join in praising God: "Praise the Lord from the heavens...."

Now it is your turn to praise. In the next few days try to find God in all that you see. Spirituality today calls for a new relationship with the whole of creation, not dominating or ruling over the earth but recognizing the dignity and rights of all species. In treating all creation with reverence and respect you can acknowledge your connection with everything in the universe.

This ecological consciousness can help you to appreciate the wonders of the natural environment and to recognize the interrelatedness of all things. Ecological spirituality teaches that the goods of the earth exist for all people. Learning to become increasingly aware of its sacredness is a matter for prayer and action.

Gerard Manley Hopkins in his beautiful and challenging poem, "God's Grandeur," captures a sense of ecological urgency. He begins with this line, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God," and then shows how human beings have "bleared," "smeared," and smudged their world. But the final verse shines with a hopeful spirituality:

**“And for all this, nature is never spent:
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;**

**And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."**

When you consider God's creation with eyes of faith, you can see signs of grace everywhere. Sacramentality isn't limited to the traditional seven sacraments but to anything that raises our hearts and minds to God.

How do you see a concern for the environment as part of your spirituality? What do you do to keep your part of the universe healthy for future generations?

Now turn to the next part of this retreat. Part 3: Finding God in Daily Life at Home [\[insert link\]](#)

Part 3: Finding God in Daily Life At Home



Recite prayerfully the mantra from the end of Part 1:

**"God loves and delights in me.
God loves and delights in me.
God loves and delights in me."**

A favorite of many people, Psalm 139 speaks of God's nearness to you. It speaks of being at home with God. Pray these lines very slowly and reflectively as your opening prayer.

- 1: O God, you search me and know me
- 2: You know if I am standing or sitting.
You perceive my thoughts from far away.
- 3: Whether I walk or lie down, you are watching;
you are familiar with all my ways.

True spirituality means to be at home with yourself (first of all), with other people, with all creation, and above all, with God. You are dwelling in God, and God dwells in you. You are at home when you are with God.

Think of yourself as a house with four rooms: one is the room of your physical life, another of your emotional life, a third of your intellectual life, and finally there is the room of your spiritual life. These four rooms are all part of the whole house, of the whole you. Now think of yourself as entering each room of your house for at least part of each day:

- You probably spend a lot of time in your physical room (sleeping, eating, exercising, etc.).
- You probably spend considerable life in your emotional room (dealing with family and friends, experiencing feelings of love, joy, excitement, worry, loneliness).
- How much time or attention do you give to the intellectual room (reading, discussing, thinking, keeping your mind active)?
- How much energy do you put into your spiritual room (being aware of God's presence, wondering, reading the scriptures, praying, being kind and loving to others)?

Now spend some time writing in your journal as you reflect on your experience of living in these four rooms today.

- Have you eaten a nutritious meal today? Have you had enough sleep? What about exercise?
- What feelings are you experiencing today? Are you happy, sad, blah?
- What have you been thinking about today? What have you read? Describe a thought that has stayed with you.
- What has inspired you today? Have you prayed? Have you had loving thoughts about other people? How aware have you been of God's presence?

Think about places in your everyday life--maybe your bedroom, the kitchen or family room, a favorite chair, the corner of a room, a window, a garden, a familiar spot in church. In what ways are you "at home" in this place? In what ways do you feel whole (holy) there?

Let yourself go to that place either through your imagination or through actually going there. Write a description of this place in your journal. How does this place make you feel? Why is this place important to you? What does or has happened to you in this place? What other people do you associate with this place? Is God in this place with you? How are you experiencing God right now?

Your favorite place will only be as nurturing as the spirit you have brought to it. Real estate ads offer "houses" for sale, not homes because a house is made a home by the people who live

there. Home is the place where you (and others who live with you) become yourselves more fully. What in your home makes you fully yourself? How does it help you to be aware of God?

Thank God for the graces of your retreat. Know that you are already "at home" with God, yourself, and others, but simply be more aware of it.

Say again the words of the simple hymn from Part 1: "We are one with the heart of each other. We are one with the heart of love. We are one with the heart of creation. We are one with God."

Throughout the week remind yourself that you are at home with yourself and with God. Repeat this mantra often: "God lives in me and I live in God."

Now turn to the next part of the retreat. Part 4: Finding God Through Relationships. [\[insert link\]](#)

Part 4: Finding God Through Relationships



Find some photos of your family members and friends. Who might be there? What is your relationship with each person pictured on your shelf? Think about what each one means to you. Take a few moments to pray for each person.

In many places in the gospel you can see Jesus in his own human relationships. He often reminds his followers about what good relationships involve.

For instance, Matthew refers to God's commandments as the source of all human relationships: "Now a young man approached him and said, 'Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?' He answered him, 'Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He asked him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus replied, 'You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (19:16-19).

In Luke's gospel Jesus, in response to a lawyer's question about inheriting eternal life, turned the question back to the lawyer who knew the answer: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your

neighbor as yourself." And Jesus commended him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live" (10:27-28).

Spirituality of everyday living is a matter of wholeness lived within God's love. And this wholeness is holiness. A goal of the spiritual life is to become more other-centered, to love others as yourself. But it is important to keep in mind that you have to love yourself first in order to love your neighbors as yourself.

Good relationships are signs of God's love. The love of and for others is how you can experience God's love. As you have seen in the two gospel stories above, this love is expressed through God's commandments.

It is easy to forget about loving yourself but you need a good self-image to be able to love others. Think about three qualities that help you to love others. Jot them down and think about these good qualities occasionally, especially when you are disappointed in yourself.

The Ten Commandments point to values which can guide your relationships with God and others. The first three recognize your relationship to God and the last seven tell you that God cares about the way you treat others. As you grow spiritually, you can see that the commandments are more than laws to be obeyed; they are ways to love God and one another.

Think of "you shall not kill" as telling you to treat others with respect for their human dignity. "You shall not commit adultery" means that marriage is the foundation of family relationships. "You shall not steal" and "you shall not bear false witness" are reminders to respect the goods and the reputations of other people; such integrity includes not giving into society's consumerism, greed, dishonesty, or impugning the good name of opponents.

"Honor your father and your mother" is at the heart of all family relationships. In your family you learned to love your neighbor as yourself as you learned to share. God is present in family life, even though no family is perfect. Spirituality formed out of the ups and downs of daily living is a spirituality of dealing with laundry, dirty dishes, budget problems, and often of struggling with relationships.

Think about your family of origin. What persons or situations helped you to learn love? Have there been difficult relationships within your family brought about by unhealthy patterns of living? As part of this retreat, take a few moments to be grateful for the love in your family and to pray for healing wherever it is needed. You may want to jot down in your journal some of your realizations. Keep in mind that God loves you as you are whatever your family experiences may have been.

Where do you find God in your current family situation? How do you affirm each family member? Do you love deeply without possessiveness? A healthy relationship means to welcome another with open arms, embrace or hold the other for a moment, and then release this person to be

free. It is all a matter of love; that is, helping each person to become all he or she is capable of being.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (13: 4-8) is such a celebration of love that it is often the reading of choice at wedding ceremonies. Perhaps you can think of it as the reading of choice for daily living. Pray with this passage as you think about your relationships with your family members, your friends, your colleagues and neighbors. Take one verse at a time and let it resonate in your heart:

“Love is patient, love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger, neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. LOVE NEVER FAILS.”

Now look at the passage in a different way. Substitute "I" for "love" and see what the verses tell you about yourself. For example: "I am patient, I am kind." Or "I am not rude, I am not self-seeking, I am not prone to anger, neither do I brood over injuries." You might use this reflection for an examination of conscience.

"God is love." To what extent can you say, "I am love," knowing, of course, that no human person achieves the fullness of love? But, as you know, holiness is a striving to grow in love daily. Remember that nothing is impossible because God loves you and you can only love because God loves you.

Repeat this mantra often: MAY I LOVE MY NEIGHBOR AS MYSELF.

Now turn to the next part of the retreat: Part 5 - Finding God in Work [\[insert link\]](#)

Part 5: Finding God in Work



Look closely at this photo. Note how attentive the teacher is. Like most teachers she is putting a great deal of effort into her daily work. What she is doing involves mind and heart. Sometimes teachers do not immediately find personal satisfaction, but know that in the long run teaching matters not only to this class but to society as a whole.

Take a few minutes to write in your journal about:

- a teacher or mentor who has brought out or brings out the best in you;
- something you have done to help someone learn from you;
- the quality of your relationship at work with a fellow employee, a customer, your boss.

As a human being you are called to love and to work. Your work includes taking care of daily life activities, first of all. The rest of your time probably includes helping other people at home, serving in various volunteer capacities, and, for many people, the work of earning a living. Psychologists say that meaningful work and meaningful relationships are necessary to human wholeness.

Work can be any physical or mental effort, any purposeful activity. All such work contributes in some way to the building up of family, neighborhood, civic, and church communities. When you build life-giving relationships, show compassion, work, or in any way serve others, you are participating in the creative work of God.

The Book of Genesis speaks of the work of creation as God's work. Reflect on these words from the creation story: "Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness....hus evening came, and morning followed--the first day" (Genesis 1:2-5).

God continues with the other "days" of creation, always seeing "how good it was." You remember how the creation story ends with these words: "Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed....God rested on the seventh day from all the work God had undertaken (Genesis 2:1-4)."

The creation story is, of course, a poetic interpretation, not a scientific account, of how the world and everything in it came into being. But it shows that there is a rhythm to all creation, including human creativity and work. Like all of creation, human work is good--and good for everyone. A Christian spirituality of work values the significant contribution work makes to life and at the same time acknowledges human limitations.

Jesus also shows the value of work. During his lifetime he is identified as a worker, the carpenter's son. In his stories and parables Jesus shows that he is familiar with all kinds of work: fishing, sowing grain, working in a vineyard, sweeping floors, making bread, like Jesus, Christians should consider work an expression of a person's love for God and solidarity with others in order to bring about God's reign.

Extending your heart and mind beyond yourself involves creativity in using your imagination. Working creatively can move you beyond the merely routine and repetitious. If you feel trapped

in a job that gives you little joy or fulfillment, you might think about other ways of self-expression and creativity.

Turn to your journal now and ask yourself:

- In what one way is my work (either daily tasks or my job) life-giving?
- How do I deal with difficulties at work and with my own limitations?

While work is a vital dimension of humanity, for some people it can become obsessive or addictive. You may have heard of people who replace God and even family with the gods of success, ambition, or power. Being a "workaholic" means being addicted to work, and as a result, being subject to burnout and despair. True work needs to be balanced by prayer and leisure. (Leisure is the topic of part 7 of this Retreat.)

Ideally through your work you should be able to express yourself, share with others, and contribute to the building up of the world. Any work, no matter how routine or "boring," can become a blessing for others and ourselves. As a human being, you are challenged to be a co-creator with God.

Gardening, a hobby for some and a livelihood for others, illustrates co-creation. According to a recent survey, gardening is the favorite pastime of many Americans. The image of a garden represents something about the spirituality of work. If you have ever gardened, you know how much work it is! But how satisfying! In tilling the soil, planting the seeds, watering and weeding, and gathering the produce, you have worked hard but you know that you didn't do it alone. God gave the growth.

As Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who causes the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor. For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building" (3:6-9).

Many psalms in the Bible praise God for the work of creation. These few lines adapted from Psalm 8 can remind you of God's work of creation and your participation in it.

**"O Lord, our God, how glorious is your name over all the earth!
You have exalted your majesty above the heavens....
When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars which you set in place--
What are we that you should be mindful of us,
or that you should care for us?
You have made us little less than the angels,
and crowned us with glory and honor.**

**You have given us rule over the works of your hands,
putting all things under our feet....
O Lord, our God, how glorious is your name over all the earth!"**

In your journal:

- make a list of the blessings your work brings to you;
- spend a few moments giving thanks;
- name some people whose work enriches you as a person;
- conclude with this mantra (from Psalm 90:17): "O, God, bless the work of my hands."

Turn to the next part of this retreat. Part 6: Finding God through Hospitality. [insert link]

Part 6: Finding God Through Hospitality



What do you smell and taste when you look at this photo of a backyard barbecue or picnic? Remember a recent picnic with family, neighbors, and friends. What was the weather like? Who was there? Were you the host or a guest? How did you give or receive hospitality? Did the hospitality include more than the food?

Most people practice giving and receiving hospitality daily. Hospitality involves being at home with yourself and being both host

and guest with others. Hospitality means reaching out and inviting in. When you are hospitable, you accept others into your life by being cordial, gracious, and generous. Hospitality is a very human action, practiced by good people everywhere.

We human beings have, since the very beginning of civilization, found hospitality (to each other--and to ourselves) to be essential for a full life. The word "hospitality" (from the Latin) means both host and guest. Hospitality is a two-way experience with both the guest and the host receiving a sincere and gracious welcome from one another. Giving and receiving hospitality is expected among friends, but the Bible asks us to share hospitality with strangers as well as friends.

Hospitality has always been a basic virtue of friendship and of helping the needy who are hungry or homeless. Such hospitality is a matter of justice. All hospitality shows a willingness to listen to the needs of others and to maintain an openness that involves attentiveness, humility, and love. A hospitable person shows a preference for the poor and the stranger. Think about

the effect that Dorothy Day had (and continues to have) with the Houses of Hospitality first established in the 1930s.

Many of the psalms are prayers of hospitality. In a familiar psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd," the psalmist prays in thanksgiving for God's hospitality. This poem of Hebrew hospitality ends with these lovely words:

**"You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come."**

(Psalm 23:5-6)

In the New Testament Jesus is identified as both guest and host. He is always solicitous for the needs of the poor, the marginalized, the sinner, the Samaritans and Gentiles. Throughout the gospels Jesus remains a wayfarer or sojourner who depends upon the hospitality of others. Hospitality to the stranger becomes hospitality to the neighbor because for Jesus everyone is neighbor.

In some stories Jesus is a guest who teaches his hosts about hospitality. In all of the synoptic gospels you can find the story of Jesus as the dinner guest of a Pharisee who is not hospitable. In Matthew's gospel (26:6-13) Jesus is invited to the house of Simon the leper. Simon provides none of the usual courtesies of hospitality such as anointing his head or washing his feet. A woman, an onlooker, is so shocked by the host's lack of hospitality that she takes it upon herself to anoint Jesus' head and then his body. The disciples are indignant, saying "Why this waste?" But Jesus says, "Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be spoken of, in memory of her." She has given much more than the hospitality Simon, the host, should have given. Jesus tells us to be hospitable out of love, not for a reward. Hospitality--thoughtfulness, kindness--first of all, involves how guests are treated.

In some stories Jesus is the host who teaches guests about hospitality. In the story of the Last Supper Jesus is supreme host when he washes the feet of his friends and breaks bread for them to eat. You may want to read the story in John's gospel beginning with Chapter 13. At the supper Jesus' first action is to wash his disciples' feet, an act usually performed by servants.

Washing the feet of the traveler is an act of hospitality. Guests who traveled through on dusty roads needed this ritual which was both practical and symbolic. John's story of the Last Supper makes no mention of the bread and wine, the actual meal. Instead the central action is the hospitality and the importance of service. Here we see the host as servant of the guests!

Think about the meals you have eaten (or will eat) today. How did they nourish you? What was your "bread"? Did you eat with others? How did your companions "nourish" you and how did you "nourish" them? Were they truly companions to you and you to them?

Take a few minutes to reflect on how you live out hospitality.

You might want to write in your journal your reflections in answer to some of these questions:

- How often do you eat a meal with family or friends?
- What are some of your favorite ways of showing hospitality?
- How do you celebrate holidays and other special events?
- How do you share hospitality with those who are hungry or homeless?
- In what other ways can you share hospitality in your neighborhood, your work, your church groups?

For a concluding prayer you may want to reflect on this passage from Paul's letter to the Romans: "Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality" (12:12-13).

When you are ready move to the next part of the retreat. Part 7: Finding God through leisure

Part 7: Finding God Through Leisure



Imagine that you are having a wonderful time. Where do you find God in this enjoyment—or in any leisure activity? If spirituality means to be fully who you are in whatever you are doing, then isn't God present even if you are not conscious of this presence?

Make a list of "the favorite things" you like to do in your leisure time (a la Maria in her famous song in "The Sound of Music"). Your list may vary according to your need or mood on a given day—but it is important that you can make a list.

The wisdom of living includes leisure as well as everything else you do. While enjoying leisure you need to be attentive to what your senses and heart tell you. During leisure times try to keep your mind alive and growing. Seek to be fully alive and to re-create yourself. And through it all, aim to live in the present moment, being conscious of God in your life.

Take a moment to reflect on all of this, on the relationship between leisure and prayer. This relationship is often expressed in music, for example in these verses from Psalm 33: 2-4:

**"Give thanks to the Lord on the harp:
with the ten-stringed lyre chant God's praises.**

**Sing to God a new song;
pluck the strings skillfully, with shouts of gladness."**

Music gives us an example of how connected work and leisure are. Any full life is comprised of both work and leisure, no matter what the source of each is. Both leisure and work are needed to achieve wholeness. If your only life is work, you really don't have a life. Leisure and play make up an essential part of any happy and full life. Enjoying this leisure and play with family and friends can add immeasurably to your happiness, indeed to your holiness.

Take a few moments of leisure right now. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. After you feel relaxed, begin to think about (and perhaps write in your journal) how you relax and free your spirit. For example:

- What do you choose to do on your days off?
- What hobbies do you have? Why do you enjoy them?
- What spiritual benefits do you find in exercising, running, walking, swimming, dancing?
- How do reading, writing, listening to music, or creating art give meaning to your life?

Some of the leisure activities you enjoy may be solitary or may involve other people. Whatever you choose for true leisure can make you more human by deepening your vision and stretching your mind, body, and soul. During times of leisure you can enhance your skills, gain insights, develop your creativity. Perhaps you want to knit a sweater, build a boat, write a book, learn to play the flute. How can you use your leisure to fulfill one of your goals or dreams? Whatever you do during your leisure is a way of interrupting your ordinary routines and becoming more who you are. Isn't this what growing in spirituality is all about?

Weekends and vacations are special times for letting go. They can be times for physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual growth. The idea of Sabbath is for just this purpose. How do you observe the Sabbath, a day for rest and renewal? In the Creation story God rests on the seventh day, blesses the day, and makes it holy.

In the Book of Leviticus (25:2-7) the early Hebrews were challenged to let the land lie fallow every seventh or jubilee year. This challenge can be taken literally as giving Earth rest, but that meaning can be extended to all of us. On every seventh day you can challenge yourself to let the dust that is the physical core of your being--the "land" of your bodily reality--take a rest. This rest doesn't mean to do nothing (although a good Sabbath practice might be to take a nap), but it means to let yourself be renewed and restored.

Having a Sabbath attitude involves your valuing the time you do not spend in work--and this attitude can literally re-create you. You are re-created by spending time in worshipping God, in enjoying the companionship of family and friends, in appreciating the abundance of nature, in reading a good book, or listening to music.

Leisure is a holy activity that is as necessary for your wholeness as is your work, whatever your work may involve. By being aware of the value of your leisure you can be more open to God in the present moment. Why not:

- sit quietly and watch flowers bloom,
- listen to the glorious sounds of a symphony concert,
- cheer at a baseball game,
- play a vigorous game of tennis,
- enjoy a funny movie with your friends.
- read a good book.

Thank God that you can enjoy life! This prayer may help you to appreciate the opportunity (even the duty) to spend some time in leisure.

"O God, you draw us to yourself through the signs and wonders of the ordinary events of the day and through the silent word spoken in the depths of my heart. Keep me open to your call in everything I do whether at work or leisure, whether alone or with others, whether physically active or quietly resting. Loving God, let me know your presence always. Amen."

Throughout the next few days remind yourself that God is with you during your times of leisure. Repeat this mantra often: LOVING GOD, LET ME KNOW YOUR PRESENCE ALWAYS.

When you are ready, move to the last part of the retreat. Part 8 - Finding God in Neighbors Near and Far

Part 8: Finding God in Neighbors Near and Far



The house here is being painted through the generous work of volunteers, along with family members. The builders represent the theme of this part of our retreat: responding to needs of neighbors near and far.

Begin by thinking about this question: who is your neighbor? This is the question a lawyer asks Jesus. The lawyer knew the correct answer about loving God above all things and loving your neighbor as yourself. In replying to the lawyer's question Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. You remember the point of the story: a neighbor is one who shows compassion to anyone in need.

You encounter your neighbor whenever you find someone in need of compassion. This neighbor may be next door or in the next state or on the other side of the world.

What are some of the good things you have heard about your neighbors recently? What have you done for them or they for you? Shoveling their sidewalk or taking in their mail when they are away? Helping an elderly woman with her grocery shopping? Visiting a lonely person or taking him some of your homemade soup?

What about your neighborhood? Are you involved in activities for communal gardening? Have you helped to organize a block party? Have you campaigned to elect competent and just officials? What are the injustices you hear about through conversation with your neighbors and what do you do about them?

You are probably familiar with the motto, "Think globally, act locally." What can you do about injustices local or worldwide? Being just (or righteous) is foundational to all authentic spiritualities. Prophets throughout the ages have called their neighbors to do what is needed, to do justice.

The prophet Micah says that the Lord requires of everyone:

**"Only to do the right and to love goodness,
And to walk humbly with your God" (6:8).**

Take time now to reflect on the Micah passage or on this passage from the prophet Isaiah: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of God shall be your rear guard" (58:6-8).

Karl Barth, a great Protestant theologian of the last century, taught that an effective practice for expanding a sense of justice is to read with the daily newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other. In this way we can connect contemporary happenings with Jesus' message of the good news, the gospel. In the gospel we see what it means to give freedom, dignity, and equality to all. Praying in this way just might transform the world--and us.

By following the contemporary Catholic approaches to social justice we can further the kingdom of God. Reading the signs of the times and bringing our personal experience to social problems in our neighborhood, our city, the world is a way to bring about "right relationships" (other words for justice). These right relationships help us to build up a just and peaceful society and can replace the network of domination, oppression, and abuse whether in families and nations.

With the current technology of instant communications we are aware of the entire world. With this awareness we can help to bring about a new world order by living Christian social principles which are based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You might want to review your own awareness and involvement in these principles (adapted from economist, Amata Miller, IHM.)

- Dignity of every person: How do you promote the dignity of person regardless of his/her social status, race, gender, nationality, type of employment, and human achievement?
- Co-responsibility for the common good: How do you collaborate with others to bring about a more just, humane, and sustainable world for all God?' people?
- Preservation of Earth: What are you doing to preserve Earth for further generations?
- Solidarity: How do you recognize every member of the human family as "neighbor"? How do you share in the abundance God has created for all?
- Special concern for those who are poor and vulnerable: Do you listen to and respond to the biblical tradition about special care for children, women and "strangers in the land"? What about those in great need in our world today?

What is your reaction to these principles? Are you nodding your head in agreement or are you saying, "Oh, no, not more of this"? Maybe your reaction can lead you to an examination of conscience about your concern for social justice and Christian social principles.

Follow this examination of conscience by choosing a story in the news about an unjust situation. Reflect on what you might do to help bring about the needed justice. Praying is an important way of helping. Compose in your heart or in your journal a prayer for the persons affected by this injustice.

At the conclusion of this retreat reflect again on your journey and on the loving God with whom you journey. How have you grown in your relationship with God and deepened your understanding of yourself and others? Pray these words slowly:

"God of the universe, you speak to me in all of creation. You call me to be my work, in my leisure, in my relationships with others and all of creation. Deepen my faith in your presence, give me hope in the midst of my everyday life, and hold me in your love. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ my brother. Amen."

As you come to the end of this retreat, return to the questions you were asked at the beginning:

What has God said to you during this retreat?

What have you said to God?

What do you say to God as you end this eight-part retreat on FINDING GOD?