

# ENTERING SILENCE

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JESUIT VOLUNTEER CORPS

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# ENTERING SILENCE

## The Basics:

Jesuit Volunteers are encouraged to make time for silence. *The Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola emphasizes the importance of sitting in stillness, as do many other prayer practices and traditions. At JVC, volunteers are welcomed into silence during retreats, and asked to incorporate silence into their weekly spirituality nights.

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# A retreat is an extended period of prayer.

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Retreats are a time to experience transcendence and to grow in intimacy with God. We must spend time alone to come to know ourselves deeply so that we can come to know God deeply too. Silence is a way to make this solitude a reality. Silence is not shutting down communication with the outside world; it is rather a means of coming to stillness.

Retreat silence is both exterior and interior. Exterior silence precludes speaking with any person other than one's director. It bespeaks reverence for God whom alone one is intent upon hearing within and for the solitude of others who are similarly waiting upon God's voice. Exterior silence represents the settling on the surface that must precede the deep interior stillness of prayer. Interior silence consists in tuning out that inner dialogue with oneself that is a jumble of frivolous thoughts, worrisome cares and negative feelings. The careful observance of silence can be frightening at first and easily lead to the temptation to seek diversion before one has been able to hear the voice of God above the clatter that surrounds our minds and hearts. Silence is an exercise of faith and hope, which seldom fails to result in the inner peace that is a sign of God's presence.

Silence is not an end in itself. In fact, silence is an exercise in self-control for greater self-discipline, but a means to an end; that end is prayer. Prayer in the first place is listening to God. Silence establishes that necessary condition for hearing the Lord speak, for recognizing the personal love that God wants to reveal and the word of truth that God wants to communicate.



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# COME AWAY AND REST AWHILE

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**It takes time to enter into a retreat. Time to begin to allow yourself to feel at home in new surroundings. Time to adjust to the change of pace. Time to let your deeper hopes and desires come to the surface. Time to meet God in this place.**

**The good news is that there is all the time in the world available. Even on the shortest of retreats, there is time enough to relax and let God do everything that God wants to do. So don't rush, but enter into the retreat asking God for the gift of whole-hearted confidence and trust in God's care, especially during these days.**

**We humbly offer a few suggestions that might help you to prepare for your retreat. Use whatever you find helpful, and leave aside anything that doesn't appeal to you at the moment. Above all, be gentle with yourself!**

**I take time to ask God to show me the me that I am bringing into this retreat. How are God and I interacting at this point in my life? What have been the high and low points recently?**

**Am I coming into this retreat with worries and concerns? I ask God to help me to recognize and name them so that they can be offered for light to be shed on them when God is ready.**

**Going into retreat involves a change of tempo, a slowing down. Don't be surprised if your tiredness catches up with you, and you feel tired and sleepy. You may even find yourself falling asleep when you try to pray. This is normal, the body's response to the change of pace. Ease into the new pace:**

- **Give yourself an easy timetable initially**
- **Include maybe a couple of (shortish) prayer periods**
- **Build in some times of rest – early nights, siestas**
- **Get plenty of exercise**

**Deliberately slow down, spend more time on everything you do. Consciously relax, take longer, deeper breaths, walk more slowly. Do things more gently, for you are waiting on God, who is to be met in stillness, and stillness takes a little time. Wait on God.**



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**Try to be aware: become aware of everything around you – the sounds, the patterns of light, the feel of things, their roughness or smoothness. The scents and aromas carried through the air, warmth and coolness.**

**Take trouble to notice even the taste and texture of your food. It has all come to your senses from God.**

**Touch the trees and walls. Feel and smell the flowers and the leaves. Through this creation God speaks to you, sings to you. Ask the Lord to open your senses, open them wide, that you may learn to listen to the voice of God.**

## **Scripture texts**

**You might find it helpful to use a passage of scripture to move you into the prayer of the retreat. All that is outlined above still applies. Take it slowly, and choose one of the passages below for your prayerful reflection. Pick whichever first catches your attention – it doesn't matter if it is very familiar, or if it's a passage which is new to you.**

## **Psalms 139**

**Thank you for the wonder of my being**

## **Isaiah 49: 1-16**

**I was thinking, "I have toiled in vain"**

## **Isaiah 55: 1-11**

**Listen, and your soul will live**

## **Luke 11: 1-13**

**Ask, and you will receive**

## **Luke 18: 1-8**

**Pray continually and never lose heart**



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