



PACEM in TERRIS

HERMITAGE RETREAT CENTER

A RETREAT FOR THOSE RETURNING TO FAITH

Come and See

A retreat for those who have been away from God, from the Church, or from faith — and who find themselves, perhaps unexpectedly, on the way back. You are not starting over. You are being found.



Sacred Paths Retreat Series

Before You Begin

A word of welcome · Who this retreat is for · How God feels about your return

You may have left faith gradually — one Sunday at a time, one unanswered prayer at a time, one disappointment with the Church or with God that accumulated over years until you simply stopped. Or you may have left in a specific moment of grief, anger, or disillusionment. Or you may not be sure you left — you may just feel that somewhere along the way, God became very quiet.

Whatever brought you here — curiosity, longing, a sense of invitation you can't quite explain, someone's suggestion, or a life event that cracked something open — you are welcome. This retreat does not ask you to arrive with answers. It asks only that you come and see.

“He said to them, ‘Come and you will see.’ So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day.”

— John 1:39

A WORD ABOUT DOUBT

Your questions are welcome here

This retreat does not ask you to suppress your doubts, your anger, your questions, or your skepticism. They are welcome here. God is not threatened by them. The faith you are returning to — if you return — will be a stronger faith for having gone through the honest reckoning this retreat invites.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Two questions — write without editing

- What caused you to leave, or to drift? Be as specific and honest as you can.
- What is it that brought you here? However vague or uncertain the answer, write it.

Day One: The Honest Distance

Theme: Naming what happened · The permission to come as you are · The God who was not absent

Before we can return, we must honestly name where we have been. The distance you have traveled from God — whether measured in years, in anger, in grief, or in simple forgetting — is real and deserves to be named. This is not the place to minimize it or to rush past it.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

The prodigal's departure — and the father's waiting

Read Luke 15:11–24, but spend most of your time with verses 11–16 — the departure and the years away. What was the far country like? The son thought he was free. The freedom turned out to be something else.

Then read verses 17–20 slowly. 'He came to himself.' Three words that describe the beginning of every return to God: a moment of honest seeing — of recognizing where you are, how far you have traveled, and that there is somewhere you could go back to.

Journal: What has the 'far country' looked like for you? And what is the moment, if there has been one, when you began to 'come to yourself'?

“But when he came to himself, he said... ‘I will arise and go to my father.’”

— Luke 15:17, 18

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

What God was doing while you were gone

Read Psalm 139:7–12. The psalmist asks: where can I flee from your presence? In the heights: you are there. In the depths: you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn or settle on the far side of the sea — even there, your hand will guide me.

God was not absent while you were away. The distance you felt was real. But it was movement on your side of the relationship, not his. He did not leave. He was present in ways you may not have been able to see. Journal: Looking back on your years away, where do you see evidence of God's presence even when you were not looking for it?

MIDDAY EXAMEN · 20 MIN

1. Gratitude: Name three things from your life — inside or outside of faith — for which you are genuinely grateful.
2. The specific wound: Name the specific thing that caused the distance between you and God. Not the general story — the specific moment or accumulation. Bring it honestly.
3. The anger: If there is anger at God — for what he allowed, for what the Church did, for what prayer didn't produce — name it. He can receive it.
4. The longing: What do you most hope to find if you come back? What drew you here?

5. Grace: What one thing do you want God to give you this afternoon?

SECOND PRAYER PERIOD • 45 MIN

The woman at the well — met exactly where she was

Read John 4:1–26. Jesus goes out of his way to find a woman who has every reason to avoid public encounters. He does not begin with her failures. He begins with a request and moves to an offer. He sees her fully — including the complicated history — and he does not withdraw.

Journal: If Jesus sat across from you today and said 'I know everything about you' — as he said to the Samaritan woman — what would you want him to say next? What are you afraid he might say?

Evening

Read Hosea 2:14–15 — 'I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.' God speaks tenderly in the wilderness. You are in a kind of wilderness right now — between what you left and what you have not yet returned to. He is speaking. Sleep in the listening.

"I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her."

— Hosea 2:14

Day Two: The Questions Beneath the Questions

Theme: Honest doubt · What you need to be true · The person of Jesus

Most people who leave faith don't leave because the arguments stopped working. They leave because something happened, something hurt, something didn't work the way they were told it would. The intellectual questions are often the presenting problem. The real questions are usually underneath. Today we go there.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Thomas — the patron saint of honest doubt

Read John 20:24–29. Thomas was not present at the first resurrection appearance. He refuses to believe the reports of the other disciples. 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands... I will not believe.' And Jesus appears again, specifically for Thomas. He does not rebuke him. He shows him the wounds. 'Stop doubting and believe.'

Journal: What would Thomas's question be for you — what would you need to see, to know, to experience, in order to believe again? Write it as honestly as you can.

“Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

— John 20:29

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Imaginative Contemplation: Meet Jesus yourself

Read Mark 10:46–52 — blind Bartimaeus calling out to Jesus. When Jesus hears him, he stops everything and asks: 'What do you want me to do for you?' Not: what do you believe? Not: can you recite the creed? What do you want me to do for you?

Then close your Bible. Use the Ignatian method: place yourself in the scene. Jesus turns and walks toward you. He stops. He asks you the same question. 'What do you want me to do for you?' Sit with this for the full prayer period. Journal what arose.

“And Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”

— Mark 10:51

AFTERNOON PRAYER · 45 MIN

The one thing Jesus never said

Read John 6:37: 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.' Then read Romans 8:38–39. Jesus turned away the self-righteous. He

welcomed the doubter, the outcast, the failed, the far-off. There is no record of Jesus turning away anyone who came to him honestly.

Journal: What has kept you from coming to Jesus directly — not to the Church, not to the institution, but to him? What would it look like to come to him now, exactly as you are, without waiting until you have resolved everything?

Evening

Read Luke 15:1–2. "The Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" This was meant as a criticism. It is actually the most important thing anyone ever said about Jesus. He welcomes you. Sleep as someone who has been welcomed.

"This man receives sinners and eats with them."

— Luke 15:2

Day Three: Come and See

Theme: What a return looks like · Not a performance but a presence · The next step

A return to faith is rarely a dramatic moment of total certainty. It is more often a decision — made imperfectly, with questions still present — to keep coming back. To keep coming and seeing. To remain in the conversation with God even when the answers are not complete. Today we practice beginning.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

The father running

Read Luke 15:20 once more. 'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran.' The father sees him while he is still far away. He runs. He doesn't wait for the speech to be delivered or the amends to be made. He runs at the sight of the returning one.

Sit with this image for twenty minutes. If this is the God you are coming back to — what would it mean to take the step? Not to have it all figured out. Just to arise and go.

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

What a return actually requires

Read John 1:35–39. Andrew and John simply follow Jesus out of curiosity. He turns and asks what they want. They ask where he is staying. He says: 'Come and see.' They came and stayed with him that day.

A return to faith does not require certainty, perfect theology, or a resolved interior life. It requires only what Andrew and John gave: a willingness to come and see. Journal: What would coming and seeing look like for you — specifically, concretely, in the next week?

THE SUSCIPE



*Lord, I don't know how to do this.
I have been away a long time, or I have felt far away,
and I am not sure how to return, or whether I can.
But I am here.
That is all I have to offer today — just being here.
Take it. Do with it what you will.
If you can find something to work with in this,
give me only your love and your grace.
They are enough to take one more step toward you.*

— After St. Ignatius of Loyola

FINAL EXAMEN · 30 MIN

6. What has shifted in these three days — even slightly? Name it specifically, without overstating it.
7. What one question do you most want to keep holding as you leave? Write it down. It is not a problem to be solved — it is a companion for the journey.
8. What is one concrete step — small, specific, achievable — that you will take in the next two weeks toward God or toward a faith community?
9. Write a letter to yourself, to be opened in six months: what do you want to remember about what happened here?

Go, beloved returning one

You came uncertain. You may leave still uncertain — but differently uncertain, perhaps, than when you arrived. The God you have been avoiding or forgetting or angry at has been running toward you the whole time. He is glad you are here. He will be glad wherever you go next. Come and see.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

— Matthew 11:28

Core Practices & Extra Scripture

PRACTICE

The one next step

A return to faith is built of single next steps. Choose one: attend a Sunday service once. Read the Gospel of John, one chapter a day. Find a spiritual director. Have one honest conversation about God with someone you trust. One step. Then the next. You do not have to see the whole road.

EXTRA SCRIPTURE

For those on the way back

- Hosea 2:14–15 — Tenderness in the wilderness
- Hosea 14:1–4 — Return to the Lord your God
- Isaiah 55:1–3 — Come, all you who are thirsty
- Luke 15:11–24 — The prodigal's return
- John 1:35–39 — Come and see
- John 10:27 — My sheep hear my voice
- Revelation 3:20 — Behold, I stand at the door and knock

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