Seeing beauty within the ordinary

Using our camera to see life in all its fulness

Welcome to our self-guided retreat. The retreat comprises four video reflection. At the end of each reflection are some suggested spiritual exercises to use before listening to the next reflection.

I suggest, as far as you are able, you commit some time for your retreat today. The four reflections are just over an hour to watch. The time you spend on the exercises between each reflection is for you to chooses. We all have different demands on our life, and you may find you can commit a day to this retreat, half a day, or two hours. Give thanks for the time you are able to dedicate to your retreat.

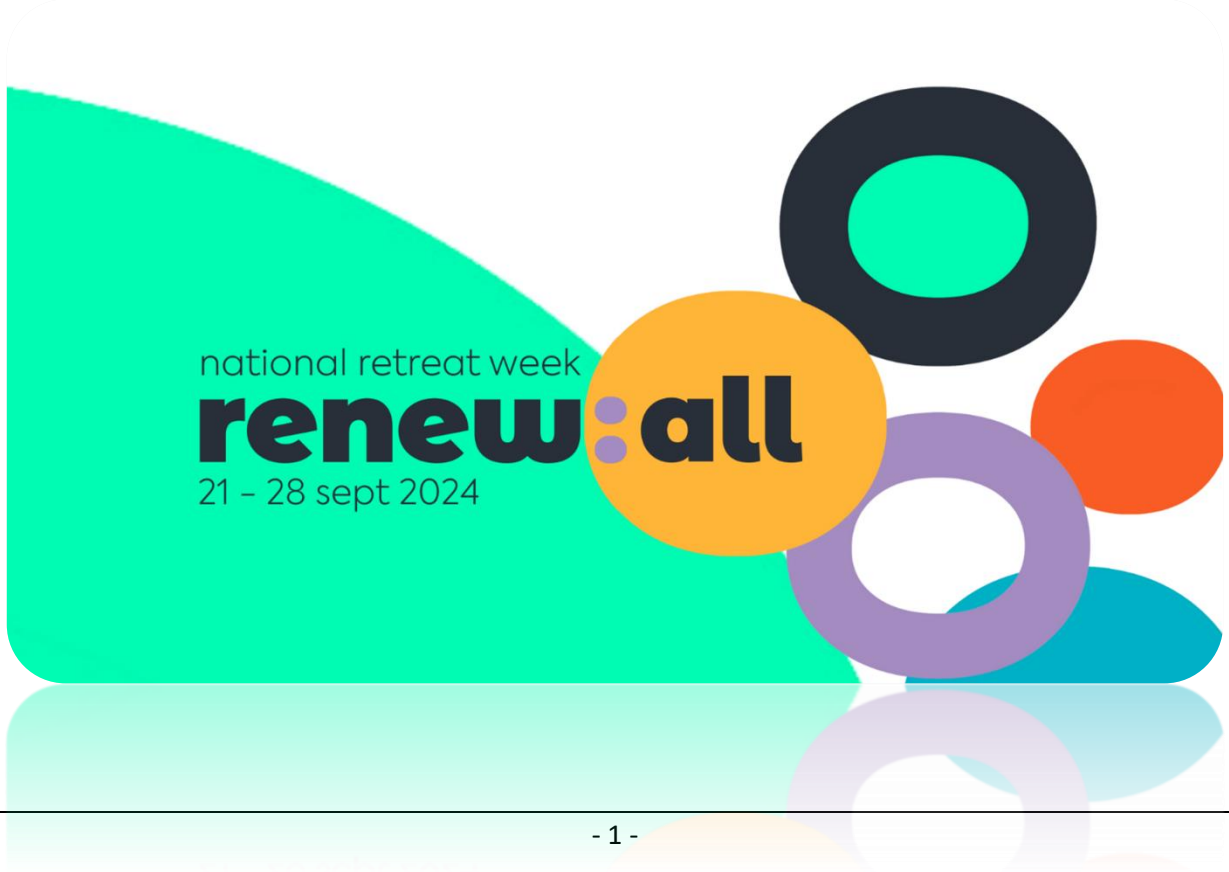
You can also use this retreat over a few days, perhaps watching one reflection each day.

You will be encouraged to use your camera or smartphone for part of the retreat. This is not about the technical use of a camera (modern cameras do that for us), but rather how our cameras we carry with us can be an aide to reflection and seeing the divine.

You will need a notepad and pen so you can make notes during the exercises.

With blessings

Steve Radley
www.soulfulvision.uk



Reflection 1: Preparing for our retreat

Listen to the first video reflection. After this I suggest you use the exercises below which are described at the end of the reflection.

A retreat is a time when we intentionally withdraw from our everyday concerns, and having withdrawn we reflect on ourselves, and focus on our strengths, our areas for development, our concerns, our joys, our hopes, our fears. We learn to see me in a new light, and how I engage with life. After this reflection, we advance back to our everyday lives, equipped to engage with life with fresh understanding and insight.

The first reflection is recorded out in nature by the sea. A good place to start your retreat is by reading the creation story in Genesis 1 of your Bible. Read it slowly, you might like to imagine yourself within the story. Dwell on the

Pointers for Reflection

- Take time to ask God to show you the 'me' you are bringing into this retreat
    - How am I?
    - How is my relationship with God?
    - What have been my highs and lows recently?
    - Do I have worries or concerns?

- Inner awareness: Noticing our bodies
    - Sit somewhere quietly and comfortable
    - Now focus on your breathing – noticing the breaths you draw into your body and those you exhale. *NB. Some people do not find the breath a useful anchor, if you don't focus on another part of your body using the guidance below*.
    - Notice the cooler air entering your body, and the warmer air you exhale.
    - Now move your attention down your body. Are there parts which feels tense? Notice the feel of your clothes on your skin, the weight of your body pressing down into the earth.
    - If you find your mind wandering, welcome those thoughts as your awareness of them has have brought you back into the present moment.
    - Label the thought with one word – planning, worrying, analysing etc.
    - Now let you attention fall back onto your breathing.
    - When you are ready, allow your attention to fall back into the space you are sitting.
    - Notice what you see and how you feel.

Reflection 2: Using our camera for contemplation

The second reflection considers some ideas about what contemplation is. You might like to write down any thoughts or insights you have had about contemplation and its place in your life.

You were introduced to a couple of views of photography. I would encourage you to see each picture as a gift as a camera receives reflected light. Seeing photography as a gift is different to the traditional view that we take pictures. Reflect on the table below about our views of photography. Do you like any of the ideas? Do any grate with you? Do any surprise you?

Photography as taking	Photography as Receiving
• Images as acquisition	• Images as gift
• Photography as conquest	• Photography as contemplation
• Subject as an object	• Subject as a co-creator
• Image as mine	• Image as ours
• Focus on otherness	• Focus on interconnectedness
• An attitude of judgement	• An attitude of wonder
• Concern for control	• Openness to surprise / mystery
• Photography as aggression	• Photography as respect

Adapted from Howard Zehr, *Little Book of Contemplative Photography*, Good Books, 2005

Exercise

Pick up your camera or smartphone but leave it into your pocket or bag.
Choose a place where you can go. It may be a room in your house, a local park, your high street, a garden or allotment – somewhere close to you.
When you get to the place close your eyes and become aware of your breathing noticing the breaths you draw into your body, and those you exhale.
Become aware of the sensations, of your clothes on your skin, your weight pressing into the ground you are standing on or sitting, notice the feel of the wind, is it cold or warm, notice the sounds and smells. Allow yourself to be immersed in the space and when you are ready open your eyes. Look at the place as if it is the first time you have seen it.
When something catches your attention get your camera out and spend at least 10 mins photographing it. Spend time looking at that object. Look at it from different angles, above, the side, below. As you move around notice how the light shapes it and changes. Where are the shadows? What colours do you notice? How do they make you feel?

Reflection 3: Vision Divina

Visio divina is a more recent spiritual practice born from lectio divina. Its focus on seeing encompasses our emotional responses to images as well as our intellectual processing of what we see. It concerns the heart, traditionally thought of as the seat of our emotions and feelings.

The four steps of visio divina:

Reading.

Meditation.

Prayer.

Contemplation.

Christine Valters Paintner suggests this practice is close to what the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians in the New Testament meant by 'seeing with the eyes of the heart' (Eph 1:18). This reminds us again of the necessary interconnectedness of our bodies, minds and emotions as visio divina helps us explore the meaning of photos.

Reflection 4: Advancing back to the place of my calling

Revisit the questions form the first session, and this time ask yourself: who is the me that is now advancing back to my everyday life. Reflect on what has changed and how this helps inform how you engage with life. Are their places you are being called to bring more colour to, are there things you are being called to stop doing to create space for something new? In what ways will your engagement with and approach to your life and those who form a part of your world change from what you have learnt about yourself and God today?

Is there someone you can share your retreat experience with?

Thank you

Thank you for allowing me to walk with you during this short retreat. My prayer is that God will bless you as you slow down and notice the divine within the ordinary.

You can read more about my retreats and workshops on my website here: www.soulfulvision.uk

Blessings

Steve Radley
steve@soulfulvision.uk

Some useful books to take your contemplative practice further

Paintner, C. Valters. (2013) *Eyes of the heart: photography as a Christian contemplative practice*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Sorin Books.

Radley, S., Richter, P. and Lindley, A. (2023) *Letting photos speak : visio divina and other approaches to contemplative photography*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.

Zehr, Howard. (2005) *The little book of contemplative photography : seeing with wonder, respect, and humility*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.