

2007 theme

Precious Lord, take my hand ...

On retreat we remember what we so often forget, that we belong to God. Our first desire and only aim is to please God. Whatever we might want or expect – consciously or unconsciously – the Lord will gently remind us that our only satisfaction is in His will. As the poet Dante said, “Our peace in his will.”

With God we *retreat* from the action of daily life to a quiet, safe place. He will tend our wounds, renew our strength, remind us of our calling, correct our misunderstandings and – and with infinite compassion – rebuke our sins. Calling us to retreat the Lord takes each of us by the hand and leads us to safety.

Hope in uncertain times

The poet Alexander Pope celebrated that *hope which springs eternal within the human breast*. At Christmas we remember it is “*a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter / When half spent was the night.*” But hope is also a tender shoot, easily overlooked and trod underfoot in the furious business of daily life. You offered someone a gift but it was taken without grace, as an entitlement. Or perhaps you needed sympathy and your friend offered advice. Somewhere in the exchange your hope shrank like a flower closing upon itself.

In the quiet of retreat the Lord renews our hope. Our God knows our world. He is no stranger to trouble, disappointment, sorrow, grief, and tragedy. Nor has He simply examined our troubles from the safety of a heavenly throne. Rather, he has felt in his flesh the full weight of our earthly trouble. At that point when it seemed all was lost, when the world had crushed this hopeful man utterly and completely, God His Father scooped him out of the grave and restored his life – and our hope.

And more! God crowned him with honor and glory and showed him to us as His Most Beloved son. So long as we keep our eyes fixed on him, our hope is strong.

Assurance in prayer

At Franciscan Retreats, a retreat is more than a vacation from responsibilities, as necessary as that might be. It’s more than an opportunity to lick one’s wounds and see how badly you’ve been mauled. It is time to love God and let God love you in return. Our Christian tradition provides literally millions of different prayers. We pray with and without words, with and without gestures, with and without other people – and all of these prayers invite God to come and live in the silence of our hearts. And there we find rest, healing, comfort, and new courage. We find that Blessed Assurance of prayer.

Supporting Community

Jesus Christ draws his people into himself through the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation. We are not simply indoctrinated into the ideas of our faith; we are incorporated into His Body the Church. For Christians the Church is more than a collection of like-minded individuals or a support system of shared values.

Christians love one another because we meet our beloved Lord Jesus Christ in one another. We find Him in the fellowship of our Church. If some human enterprises can promise only that, “You’ll get as much as you put into it.” we promise infinitely more. A generous spiritual impulse drives us into the Church and we want to love one another. But invariably we find we can never love as much as we are loved.

Gathered around the altar of our Holy Communion, in fellowship with saints, martyrs, and angels, we know the strength of virtue and the assurance of Everlasting Life.

God is here

At Greccio Saint Francis created the first Christmas crèche. He used little more than bales of straw, an ox, and an ass. Then he invited the people to gather round as a priest celebrated Mass. Rather than the smell of candles and incense, the people smelled animals and vegetation and mold. Rather than warmth and security, they experienced cold and poverty. Above the altar they saw stars instead of candles. They were astonished to think of God born in such an earthy place. They heard the good news of Emmanuel, God is with us.

During retreat we remember God is in this place and time and circumstance. But – I ask myself – do I want to be here where I often meet confusion, sorrow, disappointment, or shame? I will ask Jesus to *take my hand and lead me on*. When sickness of soul, mind, or body seems to blind us to God’s presence, we find our darkness is actually a brilliant, blinding, kindly Light.

LEAD, Kindly Light, amid the encircling
gloom

Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home—

Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene — one step enough for
me.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou
Shouldst lead me on.

I loved to choose and see my path, but now

Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will: remember not past
years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on,

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone;

And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost
awhile.

Venerable John Henry Cardinal Newman
1801-1890