

Do-it-yourself Discernment Retreat by the VISION editors

What is known in vocation circles as the “process of discernment” is simply the time we take to identify our strengths and gifts and determine how they may best be put to use in joyful service to the church and the world.

To that end, we offer this simple do-it-yourself discernment retreat, adapted from *Take Five for Faith: Daily renewal for busy Catholics*, to help you explore the various forms of Christian discipleship and the path that best suits you. The goal of this week-long retreat is to provide you with a thought-provoking start to your day that includes a passage from scripture and a call to action.

As you read each day’s reflection, keep these things in mind:

- The Holy Spirit works through you and is always available to you.
- Your relationship with God is strengthened by keeping your prayer life active.
- God is patient. Take the time you need to explore your vocation options.
- Seriously consider the various expressions of Christian commitment, including life as a religious sister, brother, or priest
- Your vocation decision, whatever that may be, should ultimately bring joy. God wants nothing less for you.

Enjoy the retreat!

Sunday: Don’t leave it to the experts

When you go to church, it may be hard to see beyond what the priests, deacons, lectors, cantors, and others are doing at the moment (unless of course you’re one of those people!). Behind that hour of Mass, however, are many hours of meetings, practice, and personal preparation that go into leading worship.

But the work everyone else in a faith community does — including yours — is just as important. Supporting yourself, and maybe a family, as well as all the other tasks of life, if you do them in a spirit of faith and generosity, go just as far in building the kingdom of God. And perhaps the most important thing you do is worship itself: Liturgy originally meant a “public service or work.”

Today's readings: *1 Thessalonians 2:9-13; Matthew 23:27-32. "We worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God."*

Think of ways your work is part of the great work.

Monday: Take the hard road

We assume the apostles must have been solid, holy people because Jesus handpicked them to be part of his inner circle of friends and disciples. But the gospels present quite a different picture. These were ordinary people who weren't always clear about Jesus' message, who occasionally turned their backs on Jesus even when he was most in need, and who struggled with their own faith. The apostles' relationship with Jesus as well as their faith was a work in progress that ultimately brought them closer to God.

Today's readings: *Ephesians 2:19-22; Luke 6:12-16. "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but ... also members of the household of God."*

Like the apostles, we, too, encounter struggles in our relationship with Jesus and our faith. Allow your struggles and missteps to become another positive step in getting to know God more deeply.

Tuesday: Passion for compassion

While a young man, Saint Paul of the Cross was unsure which direction his life should take. Then one day, he was listening to a homily on the sufferings of Jesus, and it all made sense to him: He would redirect his life to bring others the message of God's love expressed in Christ's Passion. He desired to form a community of the like-minded to pursue this mission, but he had to wait more than two decades — years he spent as a hospital chaplain and traveling preacher — before the church officially gave him permission to found the Passionists religious order.

Today's readings: *Romans 5:12, 15b, 17-19, 20b-21; Luke 12:35-38. "More surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life."*

It can take time to find one's calling and be confirmed in it. But the joy is worth the wait.

Wednesday: Learning to love

Jesuit theologian James Keenan says that sin is simply not bothering to love. Note: Sin isn't the absence of love; love is already there. Rather it's the failure to choose to take advantage of opportunities to love. Jesus shows us the way of love: forgiving enemies, caring for the poor, calling others to live with integrity and compassion.

Today's readings: *Deuteronomy 6:4-13; Matthew 17:14-20. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart."*

You can do the same. Review your day and see where you did not bother to love. Then take the trouble to do it now.

Thursday: Have a seat!

Please sit down. Anywhere is fine. Just be forewarned: Where you sit now affects your place for all eternity. Here's the fine print of our existence we all too often disregard: Our comfort and our neighbor's discomfort are inextricably linked. The disciples who hoped to sit on either side of Jesus were invited to drink from a bitter cup first. Young Mary of Nazareth may have perceived that when she agreed to take one of the lowest places in history: that of the unmarried pregnant teenager. She's now enthroned as Queen of Heaven.

Today's readings: *Romans 11:1 2a, 11-12, 25-29; Luke 14:1, 7-11. "Go and sit down at the lowest place, so that ... your host may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' "Where would you like to sit?"*

Friday: Walk with me

We honor Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, beloved for her "Little Way," which has encouraged countless "ordinary people" doing ordinary things on the road to sanctity. Thérèse lived in a Carmelite convent with her older sister Pauline, who was "like a second mother," Thérèse wrote. Pauline was with Thérèse throughout her brief life, illness, and death at the tender age of 24. It is no accident that Jesus sent out his disciples in pairs. Having a spiritual companion, as Thérèse did, can be of great help and comfort on the sometimes difficult spiritual journey.

Today's readings: *Nehemiah 8:1-4a, 5-6, 7b-12; Luke 10:1-12. "Other disciples ... he sent ahead of him in pairs."*

Cultivate spiritual friendships in your own life.

Saturday: A legend in our own time

Legend surrounds the brief life of Saint Wenceslaus I, Duke of Bohemia (907-935), originally venerated because of his martyrdom but most remembered because of a Christmas carol from the 16th century that celebrated him as a model of generosity toward those who were poor or in need. He was said to carry wood to their homes on his own shoulders.

Today's readings: *Job 3:1-3, 11-17, 20-23; Luke 9:51-56. "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."*

Separating fact from fiction may be difficult after 1,000 years, but your own track record with regard to generosity should be easier to tally. Will anyone sing praises of your generosity a millennium from now? A hundred years? Ten minutes after you are gone? If not, what can you do today to start building your own lasting legacy?

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