

Christ in the Wilderness

Hermitage Retreat Center

Fall October 2012

Our mission is to provide an environment that is conducive to silence, solitude, prayer and reflection.

Retreatant Blog...

Since my involvement in Christos, I have initiated several spiritual disciplines into my life. I keep a journal that is part diary, part record of AHA! moments. I go on silent retreats. Along with retreats run in conjunction with the Tending the Holy course I help facilitate for Christos and the occasional men's retreat either by my church or the Men as Learners and Elders group (founded by Richard Rohr), I would be "off-grid" 3-4 times a year. But my last solitude retreat was back in November 2010 at Christ in the Wilderness (CITW).

Now, calling this cabin a hermitage would probably make St. Francis roll his eyes at a high rate of speed. I've seen the hermitages frequented by the monks of his time and they are pre-rustic compared to Mariglen at CITW. (You'd have to fly to Italy to find them, too.) I had air conditioning, a wide assortment of appliances for cooking, hot and cold water, a CD player, and obviously electricity for lights as well as a comfortable bed, a great glider-style rocker, and desk with chair and lamp. Further, there's a great screen porch with a view to a bird feeder and down the hill to the forest, plus an outdoor deck with table and chair.



Along with the cabin came 80 acres of farmland wilderness. I could walk down the hill from my cabin, across a fairly dried up creek and then up a steep path to a wide meadow with several different paths from which to choose. Deer,

wild turkey, birds, and insects share this part of the property with three retreatants at any given time of the year. Yes, just three. During the 50 hours I was there I saw each of the others once; both times, on the trail even though I had a view of the main path from my cabin, porch, and deck. Solitude, indeed.

I'm pretty accustomed to this experience by now. I imagine some people might think of this "time with God" as requiring you to be on your knees and praying. This may be someone's else's practice but I am more companionable and merely share my activities with the Lord. I try to be open to His promptings but I journal and read. I have music both to listen to and, with my guitar along, to create. I also just sit and do nothing but it takes awhile for the interior noise or impulses to work themselves out. Simplify and be

still.

The one rule I try to keep: do one thing at a time. Eat, don't read or listen to music. Read without music. Listen to music and that is not so easy, really focusing on the music. Here an exception crops up, and that's what makes it a good rule, it has exceptions. If so moved I would dance to the music. That does enhance the listening, giving focus to it, inviting it to move my body. If I go for a hike, I don't listen to music and try to meditate, letting thoughts fly past and not letting them, in the metaphor Martin Luther used, make a nest in my head.

My agenda is minimal: read my journal since the last retreat. However, I have been reviewing my collection of journals since 2005 this year. At the time of the retreat I was reading from winter of 2007 through summer of 2009. I also wrote a lot this time in my ongoing journal. It was while I was writing that I realized that dancing was a form of listening to music and remembered our Christos retreats where Wai Chin would lead us in body prayer. The whole retreat is prayer, but not limited to folded hands and bended knees. In a way, the question you ask yourself on retreat isn't "Are we having fun yet?" but "Are we praying yet?" Usually the answer redefines prayer and lets God out of the box I've conveniently placed Him in.

My Enneathoughts for the weekend were all about conquering my Seven tendencies to jump from one activity to another and living in anticipation of the next thing to do. A retreat is a great opportunity to witness this tendency apart from the must-do things of regular life. On retreat there is no Must Do. "Be still, and know that I am God." That is the overriding mantra for Christ in the Wilderness and a reliable foundation for all spiritual disciplines worth pursuing. Not sure how one measures success but I'm guessing that the act of measuring could be a Fail in and of itself.

I'm really not trying to be mysterious or obtuse.

Here's the best example: I went up to the meadow at 8:20 p.m. or so, before sunset. It was hot and still, the insects weren't respecting my Citronella wrist band but they weren't biting me, either. I managed to get the swing chair that looks west and sat still while the sun went down. But it



takes much longer for the stars to come out, so I did some hiking in the dark to another location, the Hope chair, and sat there, waving away the buzzing when it got too close to my ears. I was rewarded with a sky filled with stars, the Van Allen Belt very evident. No Aurora Borealis but I saw "shooting stars" but made no wishes. My heart was full enough without needing anything else. The deck of Marigold also affords a view of the night sky, framed by trees that back the hermitage and by the trees on the hill across the modest valley from the hermitage. From the meadow, however, the experience is a view where it is nothing but stars.

Was this all according to my intention, my agenda, or was God working in it? Or is this just a silly question?

When I discussed this with my spiritual director the following weekend, I recalled that during my long wait for the night to fall, I listed some of the irrational fears that arose from being in the dark: vampires, zombies, coyotes,* and arrows striking me. These fantasies have at one time or another pumped adrenaline in my bloodstream while out at night, whether in campgrounds or while walking from the garage to the back door of my home. In a sense, I named my fears as I awaited the star show and they evaporated. Maybe I was so far from safety I couldn't afford the luxury of those fears giving me an excuse to flee. Maybe the walk down the very steep, long hill in complete darkness once the star field no longer lit my way was so much more real that the irrational fears held no sway. We concluded that these were important insights into my psyche, so I consider my back patted and yes, the idea of measuring success as well as laying credit or blame to motivations unnecessary.

Was it prayer? My fears melted away because I was with God, under His mantle of the heavens. Therefore, it was prayer.

*I'd heard what I thought were coyotes howling together the night before, so I was waiting to hear them. What made it irrational was that what I'd heard, after sharing this story with Jessie, was more likely wild turkeys gabbling than coyotes.

The retreat experience has instilled in me an ability to be still in my daily life. Simplify, savor, accept everything as a gift. The compartmentalization of my life is an unnecessary construction that gets in the way of making it unceasing prayer. I'm not there yet, but I'm beginning to know what it feels like.

Don Vicha wrote about his time at CITW: to read the entire blog entry, visit this url:

<http://greathotshave.tumblr.com/post/28016113866/retreat01>

In The Wilderness...

The fall colors are shining throughout the woodland and meadows of CITW. The turkey and deer are usually on the hillside below the main house when I get up in the morning. Mike Harrington and John Jankowski have been bringing in the wood for the upcoming



winter. I have been making apple butter, pear butter and other jams and jellies. Someone gave me some grapes which made great jam.

We have been clearing out the invasive plants in the area below the Granary and have planted some prairie plants there, as well as seeding the ground. We hope to have a beautiful remnant of prairie there in the next couple of years. The challenge with all our prairie plants this year has been the lack of rain. John and Mike have spent lots of time watering the plants and very little time mowing the paths.

Included with this mailing are two flyers for our 2013 Guided Retreats. If you would like to attend either of them, give me a call. They can fill up fast. Pat Bonavia and Deborah Hansen will be presenting two great retreat experiences for you. Pass the information along to others who may not have been here before, or hang the flyer on a bulletin board for others to see.

We have welcomed many new retreatants over the past summer months. We are always happy when new people find out about CITW. Some find out from others who have retreated here, but many are finding us by Googling "retreat centers". We have openings yet in November and December, so if you are looking for some "be still" time, check us out. It is not too early to think about your 2013 retreat dates.

Have a blessed fall and enjoy the cool temperatures. Peace, Sr. Julia

Save the Date *Christmas Concert and Fundraiser*

Join us on Sunday, December 9 from 1:15 to 4:00 pm for a Christmas Concert by Strings of Faith, followed by refreshments. The concert and fundraiser will be held at Congregation of St. Joseph LaGrange Center in LaGrange Park, IL. We will also have a Silent Auction, Bake Sale and Mystery Gifts for you to enjoy while visiting. The concert is a Free-Will Offering. Invite your family and friends to an afternoon of great Christmas music. Info will be sent out later on.



Have you thought of remembering us?

- When you are making your will and are thinking about charitable bequests, have you ever thought about including Christ in the Wilderness? This would help us immensely in the future as we might continue our retreat ministry.
- Our legal title and address are
Christ in the Wilderness
7500 S. Randecker Road
Stockton, IL 61085-8922

