

Stillness, Peace, Serenity

Dear Friends:

Sister Julia asked me to write about my experience at Christ in the Wilderness. Many years ago, I got in the practice of going on retreat periodically to savor the inner life. I went to many retreat houses and enjoyed the quiet, beautiful surroundings, as well as the hospitality. Even so, my soul hungered for solitude. One day at a retreat at Bellarmine Hall in Barrington, Illinois, a fellow retreatant told me about CITW. Shortly thereafter, I made my first retreat here.

On that first day, I was in utter awe. I couldn't believe that the place I had dreamt of actually existed. The incredible beauty, the wholesomeness in the air, the tiny wooden chapel embraced the guest in simplicity and peace. The perfect size, fully equipped, bright, clean, functional hermitage even had a screened porch! I was moved to tears, and very, very happy. I had come home. Over the past eleven years, my experience at CITW has evolved. The first few years were mostly about healing the wounds of life. I took time for reading, journaling, and prayer. CITW has greatly supported my healing journey.

So, what are retreats like for me now? They are experiences of stillness, peace, and serenity during which I have glimpses of the Divine. Paradoxically, only in this solitude do I feel complete. Another aspect is the sense of freedom - no chores, schedules, or expectations. I eat when I'm hungry, and rest when I'm tired. I go hiking, and prepare delicious dishes for myself. I meditate, and listen to my soul. This year I took time to watch the birds up close, and enjoyed a sense of intimacy with them. One silver night, I played Beethoven's Pastoral symphony and watched the lightening bugs dance along, as I gazed at the moon, the stars and the rolling hills. My time at Christ in the Wilderness remains the highlight of my year. I come away from my week of solitude refreshed, renewed and feeling connected to life. I take this opportunity to thank Sister Lorraine and Sister Julia, and our brother Frank, for their devotion, time and very hard work to make this incredible place possible.

My best wishes to you, fellow seeker, in your quest for union with God.

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