

# LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

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I'd like to begin with the warmest possible welcome to each one of you. A retreat is a holy and wonderful happening, and we should be at once very happy and peaceful, because we have come here together, and very expectant - because we are hoping to meet God.

**We have come here together** We have a habit of mocking ourselves, in order to conceal our feelings, or to protect ourselves; there is no need for that here. It should be said that one of the reasons why we have gone to such exertions and cancelled our lives in Nottingham for this weekend, is the simple fact that we love one another. I'm not just talking about our own personal friendships, of which this room is, thank God, wondrously full - but of the true love that belongs to the Christian community, which can go beyond personal taste or choice, and which brings a correspondingly ulterior peace and joy. St Paul refers very simply to his fellow-Christians as "the saints". Everyone who is here ought to feel deeply loved by the others, *because we are in Christ*.

**We hope to meet God** It is in our being gathered - not by our simple friendship, but in that deeper sense - that we can hope to meet God. Where thirty or forty are gathered in his name Christ is surely in our midst; and this should stir in us a sense of expectancy. We should be asking ourselves: *What will God say to me in this time?* And there is nothing impartial or casual about this encounter. We meet God only with our lives on the line, we meet him in the way the Scriptures variously describe: as the gravely ill patient meeting the surgeon, as the accused prisoner meeting the judge, as the slave meeting the liberator, as the creature meeting the Creator. Something is going to happen to us when we meet God; and we must use the peace and welcome of this time together to encourage and help each other, to let it happen with grace and obedience. It may be that I need tonight to think of encountering my Creator, because I have need of remaking, or of hearing his word of creation in me. Perhaps I have contracted something that needs healing, or received wounds that need to be dressed. Perhaps I know that the cost of meeting God will be a time of judgment for me. Or maybe I have been feeling lost, at the end of my powers, and do not know my way at all, like the sheep in the parable. As in the case of that younger son, far from home, and hungry in the pigsty, what starts us thinking thoughts of home doesn't much matter. It is in rising and setting out that we show ourselves to be "the saints".

**Teach us to pray** Whatever the details, our paths are converging: we face in the same direction as we approach the Father, and our companion is Christ himself, here in one another, present in the Sacraments, making us one in the Church, teaching us how to pray. May we receive the gifts of the Spirit, and share them confidently with the saints about us. We shall have the rare privilege of silence, which can be so powerful when it is a shared silence, and we shall be fed with the Word and the Sacraments. Let us also try to care for each other on the road, as pilgrims who will one day share in the utter joy of God.