



An Ignatian Retreat Reflection

This past summer during my annual retreat, I entered the time of retreat uncertain as to what I wanted from God. Of course, I always desire to grow closer to Christ and to be renewed for the year ahead. I hope for the consolations that can come with a retreat. But as the retreat went on, I did not know what I wanted in a deeper kind of way. Ignatian spirituality often works from our deepest desires, as well as reflecting on those desires and how best to use them to give back. But what if one is not sure of what one wants? At other retreats, I've entered with a clearer set of specific desires, such as healing from the grief of a parent's death or finding clarity about work priorities. This time, it felt completely open-ended.

What helped me to go deeper into the retreat space was praying about discovering my own desires anew. Jesus asked me, "What do you want?" I replied, "I don't know. Help me to discover." In my imaginative prayer, Jesus handed me a smooth, oval, gray stone. On both sides of the stone, there were words. One side said, "Wake up." The other side said, "Love." Wake up and love? That sounded perfect as a way to articulate the deeper longings in my heart. Receiving this stone felt like puzzle pieces coming together, and I felt the "rightness" of the message.

On the days afterwards, that "Wake up" message led me to try to be attentive to where God was in the beauty of the nature at the retreat center and to awaken to a palpable sense of God's presence within myself as well. I find that there is always deeper to go in where and how we can experience God's presence deep within ourselves and outside us in the world. Although sometimes those experiences can be big moments, I find that as I grow older, I appreciate the ways that God is present in small moments and little graces. The beauty of a fern that I walked by one retreat afternoon stays with me, for example. Ferns are humble plants that do not flower but have a quiet kind of glory to them in their beautiful green, unfurling fronds. They are hardy and grow well in the shade. Prayer, too, can sometimes be like a big, showy flower or quieter and humbler, like a shade plant. God is in both. But am I awake to both kinds?

The other side of the stone, "Love," reminded me how much I desire to love well and to be loved. Perhaps God was simply letting me know that retreat was a time to experience God's love and to recollect the many instances of love I've known over the decades from other people, to restore and renew me so that I can also give love. Waking up and loving go together, I think. When we really wake up and see the goodness in who others are, the good in who we ourselves are, and the goodness of creation, this re-awakening also wakes up our love.

Ignatian spirituality reminds us to seek God in all things. It's been months since my annual retreat, but I return to the message on that stone as a reminder to keep practicing the same in the day-to-day of work and home life: be attentive, be wakeful, and seek to love in ordinary, everyday ways.