

# My Personal Journey

by Monica Loh

*Take, O Lord, my mind, my will, my memory.*

*All that I am, all that I possess –*

*They are yours. I return them to you.*

*Grant me only your love and your grace;*

*That is enough for me.*

*Help me to ask for nothing more.*

*(The Suscipe of St Ignatius in my own words)*

That was the prayer I carried in my heart as the days of retreat drew near. I left Singapore feeling tired and exhausted, but I came with one simple desire – to give Christ my undivided attention. I asked the Lord for the grace to remain single-minded on this.

I now write this reflection with gratitude, because writing it invites me to enter once again into the experience of the retreat – the silence, the presence, the nearness of God.

My own retreat began on the bus to Bonnevaux, 35 of us meditators journeying together. Many were strangers to each other, but a deep sense of shared intention quietly held us. We sang ‘Maranatha, we long to see you. Maranatha, O Lord Jesus come.’ As I sang, my eyes turned towards the window only to be surprised by a spreading cross formation in the clouds, as if in answer to our cry. I felt his nearness and prayed silently, ‘Thank you, Lord, for making your presence known.’ It was then



that I noticed my heart settling into silence. The retreat had begun for me, interiorly.

When we entered the grounds of Bonnevaux, I felt a gentle anticipation. The staff and volunteers welcomed us warmly, eager to care for us after our long journey. After a short tour around the compound, I was ready to let the days unfold.

I was drawn immediately to the stately, ancient trees – some as old as 200 to 300 years. Their quiet strength reminded me to sit, rest, and just be. The grounds held a freshness, a stillness, a silence – altogether a monastic atmosphere that spoke to my heart.

That evening at mass, through the words of Fr Eugene Vaz, the Lord invited me to stay attentive during the retreat days – to let the Lord do what he wanted to do in me. I received that invitation with both seriousness and joy.

The next morning, as I walked to Mary's Chapel, the mist hovered above the fields of hay. It felt like the Spirit of God was gently covering the land. When I looked up, a second cross had formed in the clouds spreading its arms right over the Chapel. 'Is it you, Lord?' I asked. And I heard in my heart: 'Yes, I will be with you till the end of time.'



That whole day felt like an invitation to simply be present – to creation, to my breath, to the God who passes by quietly. Moment by moment he was there – in the breeze, in the stillness, in the silence.

Each day invited me to go deeper. One morning, I awoke with a calm clarity – I knew I wanted to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In

the confessional, Fr Vaz affirmed God's profound love for me and invited me to ponder the question: How can your heart beat as one with Christ so that his joy 'may be in you and your joy be complete' (Jn 15:9-17)? He also encouraged me to enter the Our Father and Hail Mary prayers not as words to recite but as prayers Jesus himself was inviting me to *live*. Since Jesus had drawn me to this sacrament, he was now drawing me into deeper prayer.

Later that day, I walked along the hayfield. The sun warmed my face, and a light breeze caressed me. 'Our Father,' I whispered again and again, unable to move beyond those words. My eyes just filled with tears. 'Abba, Father,' I whispered like a child. In front of me was a pond with still, silent waterlilies. 'Be still,' they seemed to invite me, and I obeyed. I sat down, sat still, and meditated silently. When I emerged from that quiet, I lay down under one of the trees that had drawn me on the first day and fell into a restful sleep after writing my reflections.



From then on, the words 'remain in me' (Jn 15:5) stayed with me. I held them close during meditation, during mass, and even in the spaces between. The silence deepened into stillness. I stopped seeking experiences and just let myself be, and be open in whatever ways the Lord chose to come to me. The daily periods of meditation drew me deeper into this stillness, and in that inner silence I discovered that I

was being held, and loved. Not for what I do or how well I pray, but simply *because I am his*. This knowing did not come with a voice or a vision, but with a certainty that quietly began to take root in me.

The next morning, I woke early and made my way to the Chapel at 6.00 a.m. Outside the Chapel, I saw Michael Ngu walking the labyrinth on his crutches – step by step, silent, focused. He had left his motorised vehicle to the side. Awed, and not wanting to interrupt his walk with the Lord, I just took a photo. He had come all the way from Singapore alone despite his physical challenges. He managed the buffet meals on his own, not out of pride but because he still could. Later that day I just had to break our silence to tell him how deeply his faith had touched me. He received my words humbly, with a simple, ‘Thank you.’

During one of the daily talks, Janet Robbins showed us a familiar painting of the disciple John resting on the bosom of Jesus. As I looked at it, I saw my own face in place of John’s. ‘How sad and exhausted I look,’ I thought. But at the same time, I saw myself lost in his embrace. That image spoke peace, awakening a longing in me to rest that closely and intimately with Jesus.



But I was also disturbed by the invitation: ‘Why, Lord? Why do you keep asking me to abide in you? You asked me this during my last retreat through a similar image. Am I not abiding in you?’ As I continued to ponder the

question, the question became the answer. Am I not abiding? The retreat was nearing its end, but I sensed the Lord inviting me still deeper.

On Friday, I sat again before the Blessed Sacrament reflecting quietly all that had been unfolding within me. I remembered Fr Peter Murphy's words during the Labyrinth Walk: 'I will set the pace. You just follow.' It touched a tender spot in me. 'Just follow.'



I recalled Fr Vaz's words again. How can I abide in him concretely? Through the choices I make each day – to take what leads me to Christ, and what does not I must abandon. Indeed the Lord was gradually but surely bringing to light the areas where I had not truly abided in him, where I had compromised on the peace he offers.

That evening at mass, through scripture, the Lord reassured me again: 'Let not your hearts be troubled (Jn 14:1).' There is only one thing in Jesus' mind, 'where I am, you may be also (Jn 14:3).' As I walked to receive holy communion, I recalled the words I heard at another retreat: 'Give your heart of stone to Jesus in holy communion in exchange for his heart of flesh that is alive, full of love and compassionate.' Each time I approach the table of the Lord now this is my prayer.

That moment of receiving his body and blood moved something deep within me. I tried not to pay attention to it by staying with the mantra. But after mass, as I left the Chapel, I could no longer contain it. Hastening toward Josephine, I embraced her and broke down in tears. She just held me and said, 'Take it in. God is moving in you.' I knew he was. In his compassion, he let me know, just enough, that I am held and loved by him in a personal and tender way.

On Saturday morning, as I thought the retreat was drawing to a close, Jesus offered me one final invitation: 'Lose yourself in me.' The Taizé chant for the morning echoed this: 'Let me lose myself in you. Let me find myself in you.' Tears streamed uncontrollably down my cheeks as I sat in quiet contemplation.

Saturday evening was joyful. We came out of silence and celebrated with an outdoor barbecue dinner – French cuisine, wine, and warm conversations with fellow meditators from different parts of the world. There was laughter, lightness, and a sense of community among us. I received it all as the gift of joy.



Christian meditation calls us to be contemplatives in the world. That is difficult as I have found it to be, but this very simple way of prayer, helps us to be so focused on the Lord that we begin to hear in our hearts what he is saying, and see more clearly what he is asking of us in our present state of life. The dimension of stillness is crucial if we are to live a life in Christ.

Father Vaz invited us to think about how we as a community could help



others find what Jesus has revealed to us in our practice of Christian meditation.

On Sunday morning, as we prepared to leave Bonnevaux, the Lord seemed to send us off with a final command: 'Love one another as I have loved you (Jn 13:34).' The words stayed in my heart as I made my way home.

Back in Singapore, I have been trying to keep to my times of meditation and scripture reflection. But I am reminded that prayer is no more than words unless it leads to transformation. This invites me again and again to examine how I live out the silence, that it does not end at the retreat, but deepens into the ordinary.

Recently, we heard news that Michael Ngu was a recipient of the Goh Chok Tong Enable Award. The award is given to persons with disabilities who have made significant contributions in their fields, who show promise in their gifts, and who carry a willingness to serve the community. Michael now chairs the Awards Evaluation Panel and sits on the Board of SG Enable as he continues to serve the community. It is an honour to have him journeying with us in the Christian meditation community. Since the Bonnevaux retreat, he has become very much a part of our shared path.

I remember clearly one morning. In the Blessed Sacrament room, seated on the floor on a cushion, was Michael despite his physical limitations. How challenging to do this, it must have been for him.



But there he was before the Lord in prayer. That silent image remains etched in my mind – a humble offering of the whole self to God. It

spoke more than words. As I hold that image now, I return to the prayer that began my retreat:

*Take, O Lord, my mind, my will, my memory, my liberty.*

*All that I am, all that I possess –*

*They are Yours. I return them back to you.*

Michael's simple posture, an expression of his desire to be fully present before God just as he is, became for me a living reminder of that prayer.

The Lord is making all things new. Do I desire this? Yes Lord. Only give me the grace to abide, to remain, to respond.

And to love, even in silence, as you have loved me.

