

Christian Meditation and OUR LIFE IN CHRIST

Reflections on the WCCM Singapore Bonnevaux Retreat
9-19 May 2025



*our journey
of stillness
in stillness
into stillness*



World Community for Christian Meditation (Singapore)
www.wccmsingapore.org

CONTENTS

The Path to God Becomes Clearer - <i>Christine Khor</i>	5
Abiding in His Love - <i>Emily Lee</i>	8
My Personal Journey - <i>Monica Loh</i>	12
My Special Moments at Bonnevaux - <i>Noelene Lim</i>	20

Alive with the life of God, in the Spirit. This is the importance of our daily meditation. Our daily meditation is nothing less than a return to this fountainhead of life where our spirit becomes wholly immersed in the Spirit of God, wholly alive with his life, wholly loving with his love.

John Main, *The Way of Unknowing*, p. 2

The Path to God Becomes Clearer

by Christine Khor

Returning to Bonnevaux: Centre for Peace in May 2025, after a first visit two years earlier when Fr Laurence Freeman had welcomed us so warmly, I wondered how to respond to his absence. A needless concern! Still recovering from surgery in Texas but clear-eyed and focused as usual, he spoke to us, on Zoom this time, such encouraging words that I was relieved.

Fr Laurence's presence was palpable throughout the WCCM Singapore Bonnevaux Retreat, not least from the five talks by Janet Robbins, Retreat Leader, member of the International Oblate Council, and a Trustee of The World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM). Indeed, her first talk focused on Fr Laurence's recent fundraising letter, *The Seeds of Contemplation: Our Legacy*. With this letter, she launched into the retreat, spinning one-hour talks over five days at the Barn into a spider's web of wisdom teachings on meditation.

In Talk 1, emphasising three essential keynotes, she said Fr Laurence



invited us on a pilgrimage of hope in the practice of meditation. She advised us not to squander precious energy on little hopes but to live in Christ fully awake, fully aware, and fully alive.

In Talk 2, she reflected on John Main's final letter written 50 years earlier, *Oceans of God*, where he urged disciples to leave the shallows for the depths of Divine presence. As I listened to Janet, I thought: as spiritual beings living a human life, just sweating the small stuff at the shore of life does not do us justice as God's children. Instead, with the gift of meditation, we are fully equipped to meet challenge upon bigger challenge, with no going back. And with the saying of the mantra, there is only one step between us and God.

In Talk 3, she used artist Jyoti Sahi's powerful image of Jesus' intimate embrace of St John (the classic and other interpretations) to pivot us from observing into participating in God's love – if only we could



An intimate moment of prayer



The embrace of Jesus

accept his unconditional love despite our darkest flaws (Judas, Hitler came to my mind). Ironically, the longest journey is from the head to the heart, she quoted the Dalai Lama as saying.

Talk 4 on St Benedict's 12 Steps of Humility, was a timely background to the moving final oblation rites in the Barn on 15 May of Singapore meditator Lee Kin Kit, 47, and Maine resident Don Bouchart, 80. Audrey Lim, 52, was welcomed as a postulant in the oblate community. From the primacy of loving God in Step 1 flows the other guidelines for a good, disciplined life with the fruit of meditation, compassion for others and our own selves.

Talk 5, the final talk, pulled together all the strands of the earlier talks to remind us of the two greatest commandments. First, to love God with our heart, mind, and soul. Second, to love our neighbour as ourselves.

True to WCCM tradition, Janet Robbins plucked wisdom from the bible, popes, prophets, and great teachers outside Christianity. She assembled a jigsaw puzzle of the wide range of human thought and feeling, the simple and the richly complex, all ultimately celebrating God's gift of meditation.

In the tapestry of my life, as evening falls, I deeply appreciate the Bonnevaux pilgrimage to focus on my inner life and let go of the world. In the stillness, I begin to feel more alive than ever. The path to God becomes clearer as I grow calmly and wisely and live with purpose.



The path to God becomes clearer in stillness

Abiding in His Love

by Emily Lee

The trip to Bonnevaux started from Singapore on 9 May night. We spent two days in Paris with visits to the MEP house, church of St Vincent de Paul for mass, the Sacre Coeur, the Notre Dame, and St Severin church for mass. For logistic convenience, we were divided into groups and I was in Group 5 together with Adeline and her daughter Blysse, and two friends Janette and Noelene who met again after losing contact for 20 years.

Finally, on 12 May 2025, 35 meditators with Fr Eugene Vaz, our WCCM Singapore spiritual director arrived at Bonnevaux: Centre for Peace, guided by a cross formation in the sky. Our previous arrangements for a silent retreat at Bonnevaux had not materialised due to travel restrictions during the Covid pandemic.



When we arrived, the whole Bonnevaux team led by manager Chris and volunteer Henriette gave us a welcome that made it feel truly like 'our meditation home'. Keys to rooms were efficiently distributed, and tea was served. Then we split into two groups for an orientation of the Centre – the Abbey, the Chapel, the Barn, the inviting grounds, and a meeting with Jesus in the Adoration Room.



Then followed an introduction to the daily schedule – times for meditation and prayer, a daily teaching by the retreat leader Janet Robbins, quiet time, one-on-one sessions with a spiritual director, and daily mass.



Meals, always delicious and nutritious, were prepared led by a French chef and other chefs. We formed two service teams to clean up after meals – more a fun activity than work.

A highlight of the retreat for us and especially for Lee Kin Kit and Don Bouchart was the ceremony during mass on 15 May where they were received as oblates of the WCCM and Audrey as a postulant. Janet shared with us the Benedictine precepts of Obedience, Stability and Conversion.

In the afternoons, whilst individual meditators had sessions with Janet, the rest of us went for walks to the organic farm, tread the labyrinth, discovered the Camino shell just at the gate of Bonnevaux, and visited Jesus in the Adoration Room.

As I walked the labyrinth my eyes fell on a tiny bloom in the dry paths and it spoke to me. God's flowers flourish regardless of circumstances and I, like this little flower, may be one of the billions of humans in the world since time began but still



I am a beautiful creation of God. The next day, in the Adoration Room I said to the Lord, 'it's good to be here' and I felt him saying, 'I am with you always and anywhere'. The next day in the Adoration Room again,

I got the message, 'I am with you and loving you'. And I asked the Lord that I may 'abide' in his loving embrace until I see him face to face. Daily, as we watched the sunrise, did the rosary walk after dinner, and gazed at the stars at midnight, we soaked in and treasured the natural beauty of Bonnevaux.

As the Spirit's presence blossomed in us, we bonded easily as a community of fellow pilgrims. The last evening together was marked with a barbecue and alfresco dining complete with wine, cider, and food galore. God's abundance indeed! The spirit of joy and celebration prompted Janet's question, 'Who is getting married?'

After I returned home, I had withdrawal symptoms. I missed the whole Bonnevaux experience – the meditation and prayer times, the rich teaching, the 'home' for the week, the loving people at Bonnevaux, and my new meditator friends. Everyone in my small Group 5 felt the same way and we quickly made plans to meet up at my home for a nostalgic French dinner of quiche, and salad, and French apple cake. Easy conversation and heartfelt sharing flowed from 7.00 p.m. -11.00 p.m.



Blyse, who rushed by taxi to join us after she finished work at 8.00 p.m., said she now holds her patients for the day in prayer and she also appealed for prayers in the Bonnevaux WhatsApp chat. Her mother Adeline is always caring for and supporting Blyse. Adeline is keenly

asking questions to deepen her meditation. Janette has started to meditate in the evenings. Noelene meets Janette at the local adoration room where they meditate often. I am holding close to my heart God's loving message to me at Bonnevaux, and I still feel like I am in the Chapel at Bonnevaux when I meditate.

We are now eagerly looking forward to the get together of the whole retreat group on 5 July.



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.



My Special Moments at Bonnevaux

by Noelene Lim

Last Sunday, after mass, adoration and celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi were over, I had a brief escape relaxing on a sofa with a cup of coffee in my hand, eyes closed. The fragrance and flavour of that warm coffee brought recollections of my time at Bonnevaux, where the practice of Christian meditation is wrapped in nature's embrace. It has been over a month since my return, yet I am still reminiscing over my special moments there. It was a personal journey deeper into the mystery of God to



discover and experience the expanse of his love, the essence of his goodness, and the power of his greatness, all given freely without conditions to an unworthy soul like me.

My mind travelled to that quiet afternoon on the second day at Bonnevaux. I strolled into nature's private sanctuary where the noises of the world were replaced by a forest symphony – the buzz of an unseen bee, the splashing of a carefree fish, the cuckoo of a chirpy bird. The sounds anchored me in the natural flow of all life. The plain, silent forest floor reminded me of the stability



and strength that lies within each of us; the trees spoke resilience and determination; the breeze whispered secrets of change and impermanence. They invited me to let go of attachments and expectations



and be free. I found solace in the understanding that everything is interconnected and constantly evolving as part of the tapestry of God's creation, every life an integral part of his grand design.

Then God played a joke on me. I continued wandering and was lost in the forest for over an hour with no idea where I was going. Yes, hadn't some retreatants warned I was brave to trek alone? Now I cried out, 'Hey, God, I thought we had a deal – I hike, you guide. Did I misread the map, or your divine plan?' The trees just rustled in laughter, and I was left to find my way out or be lost in my mental wilderness where I had begun with a wilderness adventure in the woods. I relied on my own logic and the navigation skills of Google Maps on my mobile phone, but the signals were weak. I wandered in circles several times thinking, 'I've got this right,' only to realise it was another dead end. Now I felt anxious but, surprisingly, not afraid. Into that lostness, a light filtered through. Shouldn't I be trusting God rather than my own bumbling efforts? I paused then in faith handing over the GPS. And there before me was a little path into the meadow where I stumbled upon an exit with dear



Janette searching for her lost mate. That was how God taught me that trust in him is the divine navigation system for our life's journey.

The fourth day at Bonnevaux was serene and sunny. As usual, I took a

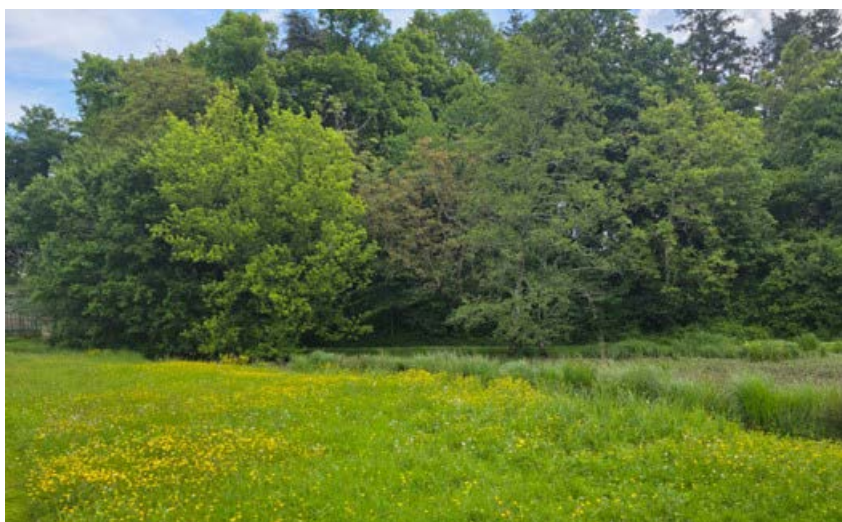


leisurely stroll across the meadow from the Abbey to the Barn for our morning meditation. The sunlight cast a glow on the grass dotted with yellow and white wild flowers dancing in the spring breeze. Each step forward opened fresh wonders of God's creation, from vast open skies to little dew-soaked petals on the ground – the humble awakening of a world in glory.

A whisper in my heart breathed, 'Pause, don't move. Stretch out your arms straight.' I stood grounded like a cross in the middle of the field. A light, pure and tender, poured inexpressible peace and joy through me. I knew it was God's outpouring of his love, his presence so real and palpable. Basking in his embrace, I felt 'weightless', like a floating cloud, as if all my worries and burdens were being lifted away. I realised it was not just a nice experience but in fact a healing, transforming moment.

I felt connected with all of creation and saw the divine spark in every person. What an enlightenment to understand that living heaven on earth, tasting the goodness of God is possible, if we open ourselves to his love and grace. If only that precious moment could last forever, nothing else would matter! I don't know how long I stood rooted there lost to space and time. Afterwards, I shared my experience with some retreatants and our retreat leader, Janet Robbins: I had had my 'aha moment' at Bonnevaux. Anthony, a fellow retreatant, said it was an epiphany of God's grace. My faith is weak and my trust in him is not complete, so God used an extraordinary approach to touch me and draw me closer. That personal experience awoke in me a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper connection to the Almighty One.

Another transforming experience for me was the gradual unveiling of inner freedom and inner peace through meditation. Each day at Bonnevaux, quietly observing nature, appreciating the gift of every life, and just being in the present without judgment or agenda, I found freedom beginning to take root in me. The chains of expectations and the need to perform, to achieve, to conform began to loosen; there was



nobody to impress, nothing to prove, only the raw, unfiltered experience of existence. It was liberation. Another epiphany: true freedom cannot be found in external circumstances, but only in the acceptance of and release from my inner bondage.

Over the days, as my meditation deepened, my cluttered mind slowly cleared allowing me to see everything around me with fresh eyes. Unshackled from self-doubt and fear, I found peace. I was able to observe my own thoughts and emotions without becoming entangled in them. I felt able to journey forward with greater ease, clarity, and confidence. It was not about escaping the reality of life but about embracing it with open heart and mind, in union with the Spirit of Christ always. A quiet joy within resonated with the sounds of nature that harmonised with my heartbeat.

The wisdom and effortless balance in the natural world became for me a mirror reflecting my own capacity for peace. The tranquillity, freedom, and peace cultivated at Bonnevaux still linger in me. There, Christian meditation became for me a promise of refuge, always accessible within.

I now embark on this pilgrimage with a conscious choice to step away from the artificial and re-engage with the authentic. I believe I have found a path to reconnect with my true self and live more peacefully, more fully. My journey has only just begun.





A blossom from the rose bush at Bonnevaux planted in 2019 by Peter Ng in memory of his late wife Patricia.

The wonderful beauty of prayer is that the opening of the heart is as natural as the opening of a flower. Just as a flower opens and blooms when we let it be, so if we simply are, if we become and remain silent, then our hearts cannot but open: the Spirit cannot but pour through into our whole being.

John Main OSB, *Monastery Without Walls*, pp 49-50

our journey
of silence
in silence
into silence



World Community for Christian Meditation (Singapore)
www.wccmsingapore.org