

Nazareth Course Guide



Image from the City is my Monastery, by Andrew Carter

A seven week course exploring the seven roots of the Nazareth Community. <Insert parish dates>.

Introduction

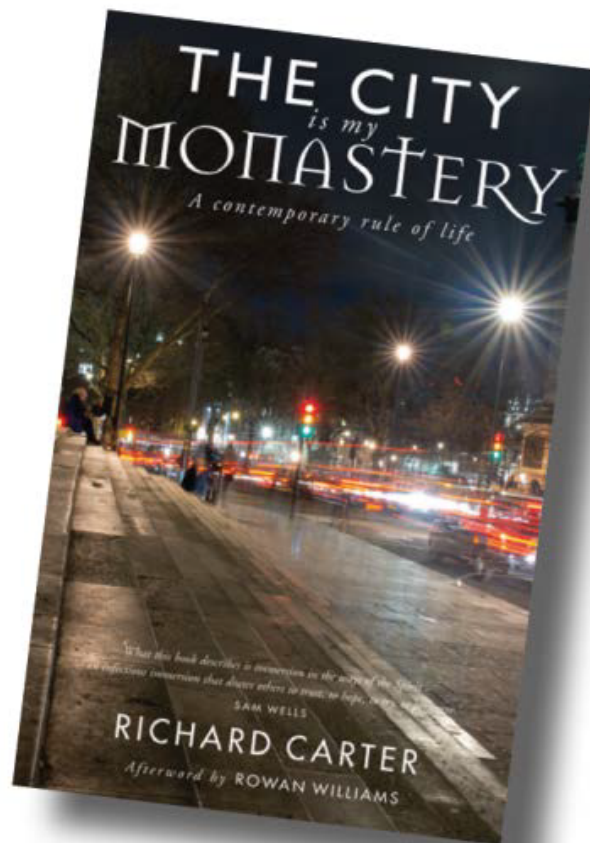
We plan the holiday in advance
But the holy day is today
The monks knew the ancient wisdom of giving each part of the day
to God
So that they tasted the height, breadth and depth of God's presence
The coming of the light, the hopes and struggles of the day,
the intensity of noon,
the shadows of evening bringing the toil to an end,
food and refreshment, the silence and darkness of the night
But we no longer notice the movements of the sun
We do not see the sky just the screen
We have used the remote and become remote
We who have no time for God
Have become time's prisoners
We have pulled the curtains on the sun and moon and have
closed the windows so that we no longer smell the rain or
breathe the air polluted by our fumes
We have been given this treasure beyond price and yet we
scarcely notice it.

Our monastery is here and now
Where you are today
The person you are speaking with
The room you are sitting in
The street where you are walking
The action you are doing now
Eternity is now
How can we make this Lent the place of encounter with God?

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This Course focuses on how we might deepen our lives of contemplation and action at the heart of our lives. Charles de Foucault once famously remarked that if we need to go to the desert to find God, then everyone trying hard to survive in a bustling city would need to have a little strip of desert with them. We need, he said, ‘to create the desert in the heart... contemplation in the streets that is our task.’ How can we become more attentive to the continuous presence of God and create the space to bring our lives before God? Over seven weeks we will be exploring our own spiritual paths: the places of encounter, forgiveness, nurture, compassion, generosity and growing depth, and the challenging discovery of the Word made flesh in one another. We will be using Richard Carter’s book **The City is my Monastery: A contemporary rule of life**¹ as our guide and each week will focus on a different chapter of this book. In this book we are invited to share what it means to be with God in our own acts, words, encounters and relationships so that we might live with a deeper sense of God’s presence in all things and all people. As Rowan Williams says “It is a workbook for living in and with meaning - Jesus shaped meaning”.

¹ Richard Carter, *The City is My Monastery*, Canterbury Press, 2019



Sam Wells writes in the introduction:

One of the best-known stories about the Desert Fathers, of whom St Antony was the first, goes like this:

Abba Lot went to Abba Joseph and said to him, ‘Abba, as far as I can, I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?’ Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands toward heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, ‘If you will, you can become all flame.’

This book is like that story. It’s not about replicating every experience related here or even inhabiting every single habit commended here. It’s about being caught up in the infectious holiness of God, and inspired by these narratives and these poems, prayers and promises to believe that you too can be suffused with the Spirit, not alone, but together, and this city can become your monastery too. If you think it’s simple, you

haven't tried it. If you think it's impossible, you're trying too hard. 'Not I,' said St Paul, 'but the grace of Christ in me.' There's no better experience in the world.

May you experience that grace in your own life as we reflect together and enter into silence, service, scripture, sacrament, sharing, Sabbath and staying with God each week during this course.

Each week you are invited to read a chapter of the book which will be the theme for our reflection.

Depending on the size your group, in the first week, you may be assigned a listening group. It generally works best to stay in this listening group for the duration of the course.

The Bible passages in this guide are taken from the NRSV.

What to expect from each week:

This is a course lasting seven weeks, each week is one hour long. You might be participating in this course in the context of a Eucharist or Short Service of Prayer followed by a listening group. In the Eucharist or Prayer the theme of the week will be introduced and reflected upon. Alternatively you could begin quite simply with a prayer, a few words about the theme for the week and a period of silence. The Listening Groups are a valuable opportunity to reflect upon these themes and each week we offer "wonderings" which are open questions allowing people to respond in an open way. A 'wondering' invites participants to share from their own lives without the feeling there is a right or wrong answer.
<Each parish insert text in this box to reflect your own chosen pattern>

What is a Listening Group?

A listening group is not the same things as a discussion group. We listen to others, not commenting or giving answers. The groups give each person the space to speak and respond to the wonderings provided. If you do not wish to respond, you can simply pass a question. Do not feel obliged to share more than you wish. What is shared within the group should be respected and not go further. The session is ended each week with a prayer.

The group leaders will introduce the theme, and the questions for the week. There won't be time for all of them to be addressed, but do take time in the week to reflect upon them, and write responses if you wish. The leader will also ensure everyone has the chance to respond. If you are a quieter person, remember that your thoughts and ideas are valued too. If you are more talkative, make sure everyone can speak.

One way to do this is to read the quotations for the week and then the "wonderings" - perhaps going round the circle. Then keep a period of silence in which you ask the members of the group to think of one of the wonderings that most speaks to them. Then get each person to share that wondering. Then go round a second time and invite each person to share something of what that wondering is saying to them. We are creating an atmosphere of prayerful listening, and we are recognising that great wisdom and learning will come from another in the group. We know what our thoughts are, but what light will others shed?

Each of the weeks relates to a chapter in the book:

The City is My Monastery: A Contemporary Rule of Life.

By Richard Carter

All the quotations for this course are taken from that book. You are invited to read a chapter a week.

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Week One - Chapter 1 – With Silence (p.1-52)

Bible Passage

Matthew 6:5-15, 19-21

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you”.

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him”.

“Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Quotations:

You must make space for this meeting
Strip away the clutter of your life.
You need to be still; you need to be open
For in this meeting you need to let the sky in. (P.7)

...let go of words completely and simply be held by the silence. Less words-more silence. Less explanation-more stillness. Less answer-more unknowing. More height and depth, breadth and beauty. More magnitude. (P.16)

One of the most beautiful things about praying outside is that you enter into God's time. (P.28)

Peace will indeed come but it will be the fruit of not putting away distractions, but of meeting thoughts and feelings with stillness instead of commentary. (P.18)

We enter into the land of silence by the silence of surrender. And there is no map to that silence because we have surrendered our control as we enter into this sacred stillness - we have entered the place where we have humbly set aside our knowing to enter the place of unknowing. 'Our unknowing goes deeper into God than our knowing goes'. (P.49)

Activity

This week set aside a period of 20-30 minutes each day to sit in silence. Find a place where you can be peaceful and still. It could be your bedroom, a quiet sitting room, a park bench, a church or chapel which is open, a walk, even a train or bus journey. Sit very still, straightening your back, breathing in and out deeply. Begin with a short prayer. Read the scripture passage Matthew 6:7-15. Then slowly read each verse of the Lord's prayer. Breathing it in, holding each verse inside of you in silence. Give the Lord's Prayer time and space to fill you and wait openly and spaciouly for God to reply to each of its petitions. Let the hope and the blessing of that

prayer fill you. And after your silent time is over, carry this prayer inside of you for the rest of the day. And when you have a space or a moment in the day return to the prayer like you would the tune of a song and repeat the petition inside your heart.

Wonderings

I wonder if you can describe a place or a time when silence became a blessing for you...

I wonder if you have any method or practice to try to create a place of silence and stillness in your life...

I wonder which distractions disturb you and how you deal with them...

I wonder if you have a place or image that is sacred to you that helps you to enter into silence...

I wonder what things you need to let go of in order to become more fully attentive to God's presence...

Prayer

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see,
And what I do in everything, to do it as for thee.
Amen.

Week Two Chapter 2 – With Service (p.53-95)

Bible passage: Luke 21: 1-4

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”

Quotations

An essential gift of our community is service: service offered, and service received. This is the service which arises spontaneously from compassion and friendship. (P.53)

We give what is alive in ourselves – our hopes, our talents, our joy, our friendship, our creativity, and in giving generously we receive back a hundredfold. (P.54)

Service is when we discover that we can, through the Holy Spirit, become Christ’s body – his hands, his feet, his heart. (p.54)

There is no hierarchy of service. Some of the most valuable acts of service you can do may go unnoticed, like staying behind and doing the washing-up after everyone has gone home. You may not think this is gospel living, but in fact it is the very nature of it. (p.55)

Be kind to those you meet, for we all carry within us the wounds of our own wars. (P.65)

Our ministry is to create the opportunity, the sanctuary and the attentiveness to recognise in each of those who come, the image of God. (p.56)

Do not fear that we are not doing enough. The welcome of just one guest can be the welcome of Christ. (p.57)

Activity

Review the acts of service that take place in your church. Consider where you see the face of Christ in your church encounters. Consider how the service you give and receive might be grounded in prayer. Now think of outside the church. Where in your life have you felt really served and helped and where have you served others.

Wonderings

Tell of a time you served out of your abundance...

Tell of a time you received more than you expected when engaging in service...

Tell of a time when service led you into a deeper encounter with Christ...

Tell of a time when service shaped your life of prayer...

Prayer

Living God,
Free us from all that separates and divides.
Open us afresh
to the reciprocity of your love,
to shape each new encounter this day
with a spirit of Christ's loving, caring and sharing.
Amen.

Week Three

Chapter 3 – With Scripture (p.96-126)

Bible passage: Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

Quotations

Jesus is found listening and asking in the temple. Part of our own rule of life will be to enter into Scriptures in the same way – listening, asking, wondering about its meaning for our lives. (P.97)

..... we begin to realise that we are not explaining the Word. Rather the Word is explaining us, speaking out of our very souls, telling our own story as we tell His. (P.104)

The gospel will become written not on tablets of stone but upon your heart. (P.105)

We are not describing water, we are swimming in it. (P.114)

Our aim is to express our understanding of God. (P.115)

The words are the signposts, the call to 'behold the lamb of God', but they themselves are not the beholding. That beholding must take place in us. (P.116)

This is the gospel – that the wounds of the world become the signs of salvation. (P.124)

Activity

Practice Lectio Divina: Take the Gospel passage for each day from the lectionary, read it slowly. Pray and ask God to speak to you through the passage. Read it again. Meditate on a word or phrase. Allow it to speak to your heart, and your heart to respond in prayer. Contemplate – rest in God.

Wonderings

I wonder what Scripture means to you – and if this has changed over time...

I wonder how you would express your understanding of God or describe your experiences of God...

I wonder if you would recognise your story in another's words...

I wonder what good news you would bring to the poor...

Prayer

God of word & silence
open our hearts and minds
to the Word that you send.

Make us bearers of good news to the wounded world,
daily growing in faith and love
until your kingdom comes.

Amen

Week Four

Chapter 4 – With Sacrament (p.127-164)

Bible passage: Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he

vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Quotations

Your love has a present and a future and an eternity. Do not lose heart. Only my love can engender love, costly love, stronger than death. Look up and see my face. (P.149)

When you meet Christ, you feel transformed by the encounter. Go and do the same. (P.151)

If we saw the presence of God in one another, how different our world would be. If only we realized that our bodies are living sacraments. (P.152)

But as he knelt there all I noticed was his hands / I could see the sinews of his wrists / The lines on his palms and the creases of his open fingers / I have seen hands like this before, / many pictures of hands like this nailed to a cross / They were Christ's hands / I placed Christ's body in those hands / I remembered that when God looks at us, he sees only Jesus / He crossed himself again and walked slowly away. (P.137)

Activity

The next time you're in a Communion service, pay attention to your body. How does your body feel as you enter the church? How does your body feel when you move or change position: for example, when you sit or stand, or kneel or bow your head? How does your

body feel when you shake hands with or smile at another person? How does your body feel when you speak or sing? What do the bread and wine smell like and taste like, or feel like in your mouth?

How does your body encounter Christ during Communion? How does Christ transform your body, as well as your heart and mind? And now look at others in your church. Look at them in the light of God's love each person made in the image of God- how can you see Christ in them.

Wonderings

I wonder what it is in your life which makes you feel most alive. Does the Eucharist capture any of this aliveness for you... If so, which part of it and why...

I wonder when you have seen Christ's face. I wonder when you've seen His hands at work, His feet... I wonder when you have heard Christ speak, or touched or tasted Christ...

I wonder when you have not seen Christ. When have you been afraid... When have you rejected love...

I wonder which are the moments in your life when the Spirit has come rushing in: when fear has been transformed into love...

Prayer

Jesus our hope,
You are the bread of life.
Come and meet us on the road, however far we are from home.
Open our eyes so that we might recognize your face.
Open our hearts so that we might invite you to stay
And share with you these simple gifts of the earth
Through which you sustain us, change us, turn us around.
Send us out, in the power of the Spirit, with our arms outstretched
To grasp your hand, the hand of another.

Amen.

Week Five Chapter 5 – With Sharing (p.165-197)

Bible passage: Luke 5: 17-26

One day while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem were sitting nearby, and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Just then some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but, finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, “Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the one who was paralyzed—“I say to you, stand up and take your stretcher and go to your home.” Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen incredible things today.”

Quotations

The Christian gospel needs to be lived. It needs to be shared. (p.165)

We have all heard people say that they don’t need the Church to know God. Indeed the Church can often seem more like the wounder than the healer of the soul. But our faith is not a private thing. The Church must be the place where prayer speaks beyond self. Where we enter shared space. Where each single person together becomes the bearer of Christ multiplied. And the prayer of another deepens your own. And the beauty of another is for you to rejoice in... (p.176)

Remember we are all beginners in the path of discipleship. The youngest or oldest or the one you are perhaps tempted to overlook can share the greatest wisdom. (P.166)

As I walk I want to be open to the stories of others, from every part of the world through whom we are all enriched. To see the generosity of the human heart to come out of hiding, to witness again the to and fro of human goodness set free. Not valued for house or job, or wealth or status but for human kindness... (p.180)

They say that spiritual guides are given as a gift to you when you most need them. If you discover a guide who can really listen, inspire, help you discern, challenge and hear your inner story with love and lightness – and find joy and hope even in the darkness- then it is indeed a huge blessing... (p.192).

Activity

Decide this week on something you would like to share- perhaps a meal, a cake, a card, a telephone call, a visit, a gift, a donation to a charity, a thank you, an offer of help. It can be quite small. Make that small act of unexpected sharing and then hold that person or people in your prayers.

Wonderings

Tell of a time when listening to someone helped lift their spirit...

Tell of a time when you felt deeply listened to...

Tell of a time when your faith was strengthened by sharing with others...

Tell of a time when table fellowship brought you closer to Christ...

Prayer

Generous God, who shared and shares all you have with us, give us ready hearts to share who we are and what we have. Help us to see those who wish to share with us, help us to be attentive to where you wish to share with us.

Amen.

Week Six

Chapter 6– With Sabbath (p.198-217)

Bible passage: Hebrews 4:1-11

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

“As in my anger I swore,

“They shall not enter my rest,”

though his works were finished at the foundation of the world. For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” And again in this place it says, “They shall not enter my rest.” Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he sets a certain day—“today”—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.”

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labours as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.

Quotations

Rest is given to us as the culmination of creation ... It is the stepping back in wonder and thanksgiving. It is the replenishing of the soul ... The whole of creation moves towards this time of Sabbath, and our lives have no meaning simply as cycles of survival without this arrival at the place of wonder and rest. (P.198)

We do not go back to work; we work to go back to the Sabbath.
Holidays are holy days. (P.198-199)
God blesses time. He consecrates it as holy. Creation is not complete until God rests on the seventh day and contemplates all creation. When we rest, we imitate God - we enter into the rhythm of God's time. (P.199)

... if Sabbath is God's time, it does not end in the keeping of the Sabbath - the Sabbath enters into all our time. When we keep Sabbath, everything we do can be infused with that sense of God's presence. (P.199)

It's sometimes only when we are a little stripped down ... that God's presence is once again uncovered. (P.204)

I swam, ate bread and ripe tomatoes, and these actions were like a prayer. (P.214)

Activity

Make a list of things that replenish you. Then review how often you do those things. Ask yourself whether you do the things that replenish you sufficiently often? Try to create some Sabbath time this week.

Wonderings

I wonder what enables you to feel rested...

I wonder when you have experienced a sense of wonder and why...

I wonder what makes you feel that you have come alive...

I wonder whether any times of difficulty or trial have had the effect of bringing you to life in a new way...

Prayer

Open my heart that I might contemplate your presence in everyone and everything you have made; all that is good, all that is beautiful and all that is true. May wonder and awe at your goodness draw me closer to you and lead me to a sense of eternity now. **Amen.**

Week Seven

Chapter 7 – Staying With (p.218-250)

Bible passage: John 1:35-39a

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.

Quotation

As you begin to grow, you will ... see your moods, and your deceptions, and the changing weather of your feelings, and the games you play – but you will not be deceived or the victim. (P.219)

There is an importance in staying with the discomfort of the unknown, fear and the unresolved, because it is in that place that we reach the borders of what we are and discover what we could become. (P.224)

We will come up against those forces that seem to deny all that we are and all that is true. The question is not ‘will I face those moments of trial?’ but ‘will I be poisoned by them?’ (P.230)

Activity

Read this prayer through slowly- “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Think of all the things you cannot change but need to stay with- pray for that staying with and how you may discover a blessing in this staying. Now think of all the things you have discovered in this Lent course. Make a list of those things you want to stay with and not forget.

Wonderings

I wonder what it feels like to stay with the discomfort of the unresolved...

I wonder whether and when we make it harder for ourselves by clinging...

I wonder where God is calling you to stay...

I wonder if ‘staying with’ could hold together the other 6 S’s of Silence, Service, Sacrament, Scripture, Sabbath, and Sharing...

Prayer

O living God, in Jesus Christ you were laid in the tomb at this evening hour, and so sanctified the grave to be a bed of hope to your people. Give us courage and faith to die daily to our sin and pride, that even as this flesh and blood decays, our lives may still grow in you, that at our last day our dying may be done so well that we live in you for ever. Amen.

Thank you so much for joining this course. You have been following the simple contemporary rule of life of the Nazareth Community and Companions of Nazareth. It is a contemporary and flexible way of living which we try to live each day and make part of our simple way of life. Perhaps you would like to live it too.

Now you have read and reflected on these 7 Ss. Read the final chapter in the book:

Chapter 8: When the Me Becomes Us (p251-264)

Wonderings

I wonder in my own life the me can become us

I wonder how we can truly love our neighbour as we love ourselves?

I wonder if I can make

Silence

Service

Scripture

Sacrament

Sharing

Sabbath Time

Staying With

Part of my daily/weekly rhythm of life.

Every blessing of God as we live out this path.

If you have enjoyed this course and want to find out more about the Nazareth Community or Companions of Nazareth you may be interested in reading:

Richard Carter: *Letters from Nazareth A Contemplative Journey Home*, Canterbury Press 2023

