

Being Alone Together

Monte Oliveto 2018

compiled by
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It was God who did it. He arranged that this rich harvest of meditators from Singapore be at Monte Oliveto for the Silent Meditation Retreat of June 2018. The catalyst was just one person from the Nativity Church meditation group who informed the rest that she was planning to make the retreat. That spark inflamed another six meditators. Then WCCM Singapore connected us with others planning to go. We got in touch but met for the first time at Monte Oliveto. How amazing that, small as Singapore is, we had not met before, and how wonderful to experience God's loving hand bringing us together in this sacred place!

The sense of 'belonging' and of 'community' was strong even before the journey started. From the spark that lit the fire in March, excitement, joy and connectedness became our travelling companions, together with a deepening faith and peace as we allowed the Holy Spirit to lead and bless us.

The retreat programme was a blessing. It provided a balance of silence, meditation, teaching, and Eucharist, followed by compline (night prayer) with the monks. Through the days we shared silence with the wider WCCM community with times of interaction in small groups, and more casually with the whole group over dinner. The relaxing 'soft yoga' and 'wall-clinging' exercises kept us physically alert to the work of meditation. It was truly amazing for us to hear the morning readings from the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Christian scriptures, and to be inspired by the synergy of all three.

Fr Laurence Freeman's talks illumined the fact that loneliness is the outcome of rejection or personal crises that lead to sadness, depression and withdrawal. Retreatants recognised that loneliness is failed solitude and that meditation brings us out of loneliness into the serenity of solitude by re-focusing our attention away from ourselves and opening it to the other. Solitude releases our capacity to love.



We were all richly inspired by the experience of the retreat. Below are some reflections from members of our group.

Many backgrounds, one desire: The programme structure was fitting for all, coming from different nationalities and different cultures. It amazed me how wonderful God is to each and every one of us coming together despite different backgrounds but with one same desire viz to meditate. - *Josephine Lee*

Balance of profound reflection and gentle exercise: The highlight of the retreat was the silence and the *four* periods of meditation each day, and Fr Laurence's profound yet simple reflections on Loneliness to Solitude. The gentle exercises and yoga that punctuated each day kept us physically attuned to the work of meditation. - *Sr Cecily Pavri*

Learned to open the door of my heart: Fr Laurence talks deepened my appreciation of God's Great Gift of Meditation to me. It helped me to recall how in my search for a deeper prayer life and a deeper relationship with God, I learned to 'open the door of my heart' through the teachings and my reading on Christian Meditation resulting in my conscious awareness of 'who I am' – my vulnerability, self-centeredness, ego, pride, sinfulness – and who God is to me, the indwelling Spirit within me. - *Geraldine Yeo*

So intimate yet so embracing: To experience these teachings live was truly amazing: the daily readings from the *Upanishads* or the *Bhagavad Gita*, the references to Buddhist teachings or practices, the private sessions, etc. The daily Eucharist, which followed a session of holy discussion, is the most beautiful I have ever participated in – so intimate yet so embracing, each saying the Our Father in silence in our native language. - *Lam Nguyen Phuong*



Solitude is choice with purpose: The theme of the retreat Solitude: Being Alone Together opened up my understanding of the difference between solitude and loneliness. Solitude is choice with purpose. We choose to go into solitude as we need it. And meditation is a way to solitude. - *Joseph Yeo*

A step closer to silence: The Monte Oliveto retreat took me a step closer to silence, stillness and simplicity for my soul to be in communion with my Creator. - *Melissa Chai*

God took over the work of inner transformation: Christian Meditation is different. Whenever I meditate I am completely present to God and fully surrendered to his work in my heart. I experience him changing me from within. Without my having to work so consciously at practising virtue but certainly working really hard to be faithful to and during meditation, God took over the work of inner transformation. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, I have grown into a peacefulness and inner joy I've not known before. - *Sr Cecily Pavri*

Memorable, enriching, nurturing: This retreat gave me a wonderful time of Being Together Alone in Solitude. It's very memorable, enriching and nurturing. - *Dorothy Woo*

The way to healthy solitude: I am convinced of the need to have solitude, and meditation is the way to healthy solitude. - *Joseph Yeo*

From loneliness to solitude: I found the value of meditation and meditating alone together. It helps to build community – a community of faith that can transcend loneliness and transform it into solitude. - *Josephine Lee*

The waves are also the ocean: We all have the same aspirations and face similar issues; and, extending this awareness beyond the group to the whole of humanity, we are all one – like the waves are also the ocean. It's a blessing to feel part of the same family with such a diverse group of people with vastly different backgrounds. - *Lam Nguyen Phuong* ■