



REFLECTIVE PRACTICES AND SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

*“A pilgrimage is a ritual journey with a sacred purpose.
Every step along the way has meaning.
The pilgrim knows that life giving challenges will emerge.
A pilgrimage is not a vacation;
It is a transformational journey during which significant change takes place.
New insights are given.
Deeper understanding is attained.
New and old places in the heart are visited.
Blessings are received and healing takes place.
On return from the pilgrimage, life is seen with different eyes.
Nothing will ever be quite the same again”.*

Macrina Wiederkehr

Because a pilgrimage is a spiritual experience, aimed at letting us undertake an internal as well as an external journey, the pilgrim is encouraged to engage in reflective practices that help enrich them both spiritually and humanly. Sacred places and fellow pilgrims open up the hearts and souls of those who travel. Reflection, contemplation and discernment help us to become aware of, and to explore, these openings to the transcendent.



Reflective practices help the pilgrim find personal meaning in what has been seen, felt, heard, and experienced along the journey. We learn to integrate these experiences at a deeper level and in a more holistic way. The mysteries work inside us. We change.

Reflective practices also help us come to deeper ways of expressing and knowing ourselves. Deeper levels of awareness and understanding can be explored during reflective activities. Engaging with symbols, images, poetry, metaphors, music, colour, sound and so on can take us out of our dominant cognitive functioning and help us sense how our spirits, hearts, and deepest feelings are being touched. Just as we keep our bodies fit through physical exercise, so also we can develop our spirit through these reflective or spiritual exercises.

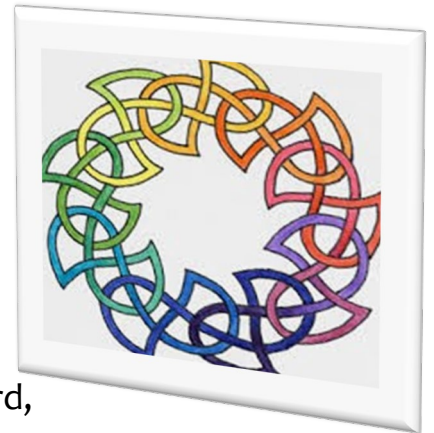


Throughout the whole pilgrimage journey, you will be invited to engage in a range of reflective practices, as outlined below. These practices will encourage reflection at several levels – rational, emotional, spiritual, physical and metaphysical – and help facilitate the “*journey in*” as the outward physical journey unfolds.

1. JOURNALING

The practice of journaling is a private **exploration** into our inner selves. Journaling is one of the most profound ways to chronicle events and capture emotions and feelings. It can allow us to express and reveal parts of ourselves that are suppressed, hidden, or unconscious. Here are a few of the many journaling techniques you may like to explore.

- **Free Writing:** When writing freely, allow words to flow freely without editing or proofing. While it takes practice, build your skill by extending the amount of time you write. This style of journal writing may take on a type of stream of consciousness approach.
- **Trigger Point:** Choose a word, symbol, card, incident, quote, or phrase. Begin free writing while viewing an image or remembering an encounter or sacred site and allowing it to activate your creativity and insights.
- **World Web or Mind Map:** This uses a concise, nonlinear way to explore an idea, topic, or concept. Develop a theme by writing an opening word in the centre of the page and circling it. Follow by writing related words around the main word (or drawing symbols), connecting each by a line extending outward, until a connected word web forms. Explore this process and build a creative web rich with possibilities.
- **Responding to set questions or open-ended sentences:**
 - I have been inspired by ...
 - I have been challenged by ...
 - I have been touched by ...
 - I would like to further explore ...
 - I would like to know more about ...





2. CHOOSING A SYMBOL, METAPHOR OR SIMILE

Sometimes we are unable to find words to describe our inner feelings. You might choose a physical object as a symbol that helps express what you are thinking or feeling. Similarly, you might be invited to choose a metaphor or simile to give expression to your inner journey.

3. FOCUSING ON AN IMAGE OR ITEM

You may be invited to “gaze upon” an image, symbol or item and to notice and reflect upon its significance for you.

4. POETRY

Words/ lyrics in poems and songs give creative and imaginative ways of expressing experience. In light of an experience you may be invited to engage with the following:

- Writing a poem or a song;
- Choosing a song title or a line from a song; and
- Choosing a poem title or a line from a poem.



5. STORY TELLING

While on pilgrimage you are being invited into the story of Mary Aikenhead and the story of the Sisters of Charity.

Stories recreate events we may or may not have experienced ourselves. They engender a sense of wonder at the world and deepen our understanding of the journey of others and ourselves too. Stories teach us about life, about ourselves and about others. Storytelling is a unique way for us to develop an understanding, respect and a sense of deep appreciation. You may be asked to reflect on:

- What is the narrative here?
- What is the story I will be telling about?
- Using your imagination and changing the ending of the “known” story
- Reflecting on what is the next chapter of the known story
- Imagining what the “untold” story might be.



6. SILENCE

All great spiritual journeys end in silence: on the one hand an awareness of our smallness and on the other hand an awareness of the infinite indescribable mystery of being. The pilgrim learns to sit in silence, in awe of the mystery of the journey. Time will be provided for you to stay with your own inner world to notice what thoughts, issues, sensations, emotions arise.

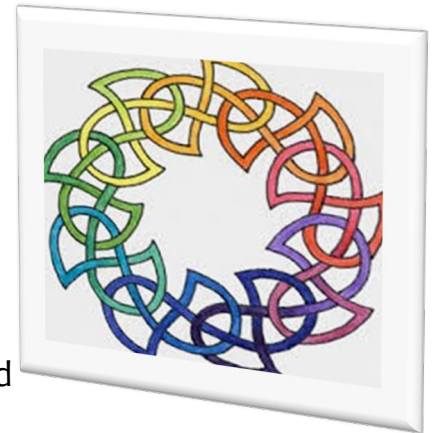
7. PRAYER

- **Silent Prayer:** You may be invited at different times to pray silently at a sacred site, for example, or be afforded time within a liturgy for silent prayer. Offer a prayer in the way that is meaningful for you.
- **Personal Prayer:** An invitation may be extended to offer a prayer during communal prayer time or as a Prayer of the Faithful during Mass. If this is the case, you will be informed prior to the celebration and given time to prepare.
- **Communal Prayer:** There will be times we will gather for prayer together at our accommodation, at sacred sites or community gatherings with the Sisters in Ireland. You may be asked to prepare this prayer, to read some scripture or a prepared prayer.
- **The Mass:** There will be a couple of occasions when Mass will be celebrated together. No matter what your religious affiliation or practice you are invited to be present in this holy rite. You will be informed of the structure, prayers and responses for the Mass, and procedures for seeking a blessing at communion time if you are not Catholic.
- **Responding to Scripture with a word or phrase:** During our prayer time, some Scripture may be read, and you are invited to hold any word or phrase that catches your attention. Sometimes the reading is read twice. Listen carefully and see what word or phrase stays with you, touches you or challenges you. Share your word or phrase when asked.





- **Awareness Examen:** This prayer is drawn from the Ignatian tradition in which Mary Aikenhead was formed. The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern his direction for us. The method below is adapted from a technique described by Ignatius Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*.
 - Become aware of God's presence.
 - Review the day with gratitude.
 - Pay attention to your deeper feelings: how has the Spirit of God touched you today.
 - Choose one feature of the day and pray from it: for forgiveness, for thanks, for the healing of others ... and so on.
 - Look toward tomorrow with thanks and prayer.



8. PRAYER COMPANIONS

You may seek a prayer companion to share your spiritual journey with, or to pray with through the Psalms, the Rosary, or other shared prayers of the Catholic Church.

9. MEDITATION

Through the experience of meditation and practices of mindfulness, the "journey in" can be facilitated. In a quieter state and space where we are drawn into our inner landscape, we can notice things that at a conscious level are not obvious. Meditation can be guided by a leader, inviting us to draw on our capacity to notice, visualise and imagine.

10. BEGGING

There are times when the pilgrim has to beg for water, food, warm clothes, shelter, medicine, and rest. Becoming aware of our limitations and needs is also becoming aware of our need for Providence. Only through begging can we truly experience the generosity of others. And only in acknowledging our deepest helplessness, and trusting in God's Providence, can we find the Providence of God and love of Go

