

If time allows you may like to invite comments on this exercise, maybe inviting a comparison with the tasting one. Otherwise go on to the closing readings and prayer. You may like to read some or all of the passages slowly and meditatively, ending with the prayer of Elizabeth of the Trinity.

Closing Readings

O taste and see that the Lord is good;
Psalm 34.8

How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Psalm 119.103

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

Closing Prayer

I desire to be all silence,
all adoration,
to penetrate ever deeper and deeper into God,
and to be so filled with God
that I may by my prayer
give him to those who do not know him.
Elizabeth of the Trinity

Learning to be Still

Leader's Notes - Session 4:

Coming to our Senses

Opening Prayer

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all adoration,
to penetrate ever deeper and deeper into God,
and to be so filled with God
that I may by my prayer
give him to those who do not know him.
Elizabeth of the Trinity

Introduction

Remind people that these sessions are intended to help us pray with the heart rather than the head. This session we shall be using some of our senses to help us be conscious of God's presence and to rest in it, to "taste and see that the Lord is good".

Focusing on our senses enables us to move from concentrating on our thoughts and what is going on in our minds. We begin again by becoming aware of our body sensations, feeling each part of the body in turn. As we "come to our senses" we relax more and become still. Once we get into thinking mode we dwell on the past or the future, and rarely stay in the present. To pray we need to be in the present moment. Explain that having become more aware of our body sensations we shall move directly to the next exercise which involves going outside or at the very least looking out of the window. As this is an exercise about seeing, do encourage people to venture outside even if it is raining, as long as they will not catch cold by doing so. Allow time for people to fetch coats and have them ready so that they can stay with their awareness and simply move into a different space. Have the words of the canticle [Benedicite] ready in case people want to take them with them as a prompt, but discourage them from concentrating on them; rather they should be thought of as a response to the world around them.

Exercise 1

Sit comfortably with your feet on the floor and your back supported by the chair. Close your eyes. I invite you to become aware of the sensations in your body at this moment ... Be aware of the touch of your clothes on your shoulders ... on your back... your back touching the chair... your hands on your lap... become aware of your thighs touching the chair... become conscious of your feet touching your shoes... now become aware of your posture ... Once again .. your shoulders... your back... your right hand... your left hand... your thighs... your feet... your sitting posture...

Now choose one area of the face, the forehead, or cheek or chin. Try to pick up as many sensations as possible in this area. If there are apparently no sensations, return to the previous exercise for a minute, then try again. If you notice any sensation, stay with it and be aware of the type of sensation – pricking, burning, numbness, itching, throbbing.

Allow five or ten minutes for this. Then move straight into the second exercise.

Exercise 2

In a few moments I shall invite you to go outside (adjust as necessary) and to look around you, to wonder at what you see, be it large or small, the sky, the shape of the trees, a single leaf. Try to remain in the quietness, so that you see with “the eyes of your heart”. [Eph.1] You may like to pick up the sheet with the words of the canticle, but try to respond from the heart, rest in the glory of God and be thankful. [Read some verses from the canticle.] Let us see that the Lord is good.... [Lead the way in moving outside]

The time you allow for this exercise will to some extent depend on the weather. When people gather again, take some time to check how everyone found the exercise. Emphasise again that what is shared is confidential to the group and that there should be no discussion and that all are free to say nothing. Then explain that tasting our coffee this week is the next exercise!

Allow plenty of time for this. Prepare everything, including glasses and jugs of iced water, lemon water, perhaps offering fruit teas, and biscuits

of different textures (note that biscuits eaten contemplatively contain no calories!) Encourage total silence and awareness of each action as people make their drink and choose biscuits.

Exercise 3

I invite you now to make a drink. Do this in silence, slowly and deliberately; be aware of each action and your feelings of anticipation. Take your drink and biscuit somewhere quiet and sit down with it. Take time to be aware of the mug or glass as you hold it in your hands. Be aware of the aroma as you raise the mug or glass to your lips, the sensation as you take each sip. Really taste each sip, be aware of any different flavours. Do the same with your biscuit, be aware of the texture as you bite it, savour each mouthful, concentrate on the taste. If you would like to savour a second drink, please do so. Avoid as far as possible any thinking. Rest in the present moment and be thankful.

When you gather after coffee invite any comments on this exercise. Encourage people to explore the experience of taking time to taste.

The next exercise focuses on touch. Gather a number of objects of contrasting textures that can be held comfortably in the hand - different stones, chestnuts in their outer casing, fir cones, prickly beech nuts, feathers, teasels, fabric. Set them out in advance and invite people to take two contrasting objects, hold them and notice as much as possible about each in turn, concentrating on touch rather than the other senses.

Exercise 4

I invite you to choose two contrasting objects and spend some time holding each in turn in your hands. Before you begin take a few minutes to become still again, using one of the exercises we have learnt. Curl your fingers around each one and allow yourself to feel it for some time. You may find it helpful to close your eyes to help you focus on the feel of each object. Notice the texture. Is it smooth, rough, prickly, soft, hard, is it warm, cold? Again try not to think about the object in your hand, simply be aware of it. Take your time and when you are ready move on to the second object and repeat the process. Again, rest in the present moment and be thankful.