

Spiritual Life.... Alone with God

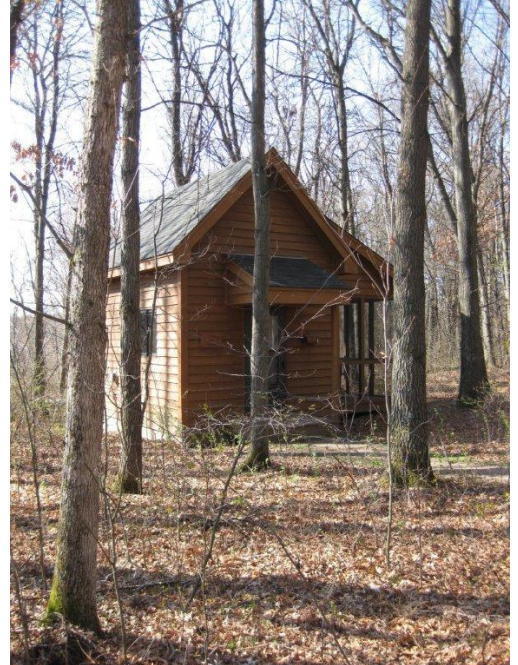
September 2014

I just got back from a short (forty-hour) personal retreat. I've been doing these off and on for many years, with the goal of doing two a year. By far, my favorite place to do this is at **PACEM IN TERRIS**, north of St Francis. Check out their website to see pictures and read the history.

I was reminded when I was getting ready to leave on Tuesday that the hard parts of retreating come before you get there. First of all, you have to decide to go. That means you have to prioritize time alone with God above all the other things that need to get done. And then you really have to do it! It only works for me if I put it on the calendar a few months ahead, and then just work everything else around it.

Then, you have to explain to people why you're gone. "I'm going on personal retreat," you say. "Really?!" others reply. "Where? All by yourself? In silence? Why? What are you going to do??" Nobody likes to seem different, and for some folks this taking a day and a half away to be alone with God is just plain weird! Finally, you have to actually leave. Every time I do this, I come face to face with the unsettling fact that that, yes, indeed, the world is going to keep going just fine without me. There's always just a little grief with this. Work will be fine, family will be fine, friends will be fine. I can pull out my part in the world and the world hardly knows the difference. It's humbling. And freeing.

Pacem in Terris is about an hour's drive from here. A good time to wind down, take some deep breaths, turn the radio off. Once I arrive, one of the friendly hostesses welcomes me and drive me out to my hermitage. The hermitage is a single wooden dwelling – too classy to be a cabin – designed to help retreaters be alone with God. It has everything I need for the next day and a half: bed, hot plate, water, a basket of food, a lovely porch and enormous windows looking out at the woods. It would be nice if it had electricity and running water too, but it doesn't and I'm good with that by now.



I've brought my Bible and my journal and some colored pencils. That's enough. Sometimes I bring another spiritual book to facilitate my thinking and praying, but mostly it's just not necessary. I spend my time in quiet, breathing in the beauty that surrounds me. Slowly but surely, I am reminded that God is here, with me and in me. And that the only purpose of this time is to enjoy each other's company.

I sleep when I need to, walk when I want to, sit and watch the wind in the leaves for hours. I write, and I pray. That's it. The time goes too quickly. When the second morning comes, my body feels the weight of my responsibilities set in. It's time to go. I pack up my little bag and tidy up any messes I've made. Then I turn to say "thank you" to God who provided this space and for time we spent together. I close the door and sigh. I'll be back.