



DOROTHY JONES

Since entering the programme of formation to become an Associate of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, two big highlights of my year have been the Associate Day and the Associate's Retreat. This year, I was told it would not be a preached retreat but an individually guided one.

Oh, what would that be like I wondered, never having been on one before! Came the day and there we were, gathering for tea, renewing acquaintance and meeting new people. One of the sisters gave an introduction explaining how the weekend would work. Three sisters would each be guiding three of us with a preliminary session that evening, then sessions on Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. These discussions would be based on given texts of Scripture which we would have studied and could last up to half an hour if we so wished. I couldn't imagine myself being able to talk for half an hour, having occasionally, in the past, during a day of recollection been invited to consider a scene from the Gospel such as the return of the prodigal son, then giving comments.

Fortunately, then I was in a large group and was able to evade having to speak since I had nothing to add. This is different! Having read through my given text at intervals, I turned up at my allotted time to see my Sister guide. She very gently and skillfully, led me through the text, drawing me out – What was the meaning of that? – How was it relevant today? – How did it apply to my life? I noticed Sister glance up at the clock. Surely we had not been half an hour yet? Yes, it was time for the next retreatant and off I went with a new text – this time a Psalm. By Sunday afternoon, I had been shown how to expand and deepen my prayer life using Scripture. Would I like to go on an individually guided retreat again? Yes, definitely! Going home the next day, the train was delayed, due to overhead cables being down – but it didn't matter – I was in my own little bubble, thanking God for the privilege of being in Ladywell for that weekend, and for what He had given me through the Sisters there.