

# THE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL INTO GOD<sup>1</sup>

Antony E. Jukes OFM

## INTRODUCTION

As part of the oral examination<sup>2</sup> for the course on Saint Bonaventure's work, *The Journey of the Human Person into God*, those taking the course for credit were invited to present a summary of the structure and a plan that could be used to teach the journey to a certain group of people chosen from a list. I decided to plan a seven week retreat program for a group of novices and postulants as they are relatively free from external commitments, though the program could be adapted for various other groups.

It struck me that though Bonaventure's work *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* is usually translated as 'The Journey of the Soul into God,' the course was titled 'The Journey of the Human Person into God.' There is a difference between the two. The term 'human person' implies not just the soul but the body, soul and spirit, in other words the whole person. The idea of the whole human person entering fully into God was far more attractive as it speaks of the goodness of not just the soul but also our bodies that God has gifted us with. Therefore I intended to plan a retreat that would involve the whole human person, the full being, body, soul and spirit. Such a retreat would involve the heart, mind and gut, the thoughts, feelings and emotions, using all the bodily senses to give a sensation of the whole human person journeying into God.

### **Daily Prayer and Mass**

Daily community prayer will take place in the oratory at 7.00am, 12.00noon and 6.00pm, unless otherwise stated. Daily Mass will follow on from midday prayer. The exception will be Sunday morning when the novices and postulants will attend a Mass with the local community in the friary church. This is to maintain a sense of the wider community. For though we step away from the world during a retreat to spend time with God, the Sunday Mass will help serve as a reminder that we are journeying not just as individuals but as a people, a community of believers, towards God. We need God but we also need each other, just as we are called not only to love God, but also to love our neighbour (Matthew 22:37-39).

### **The Preparation Week**

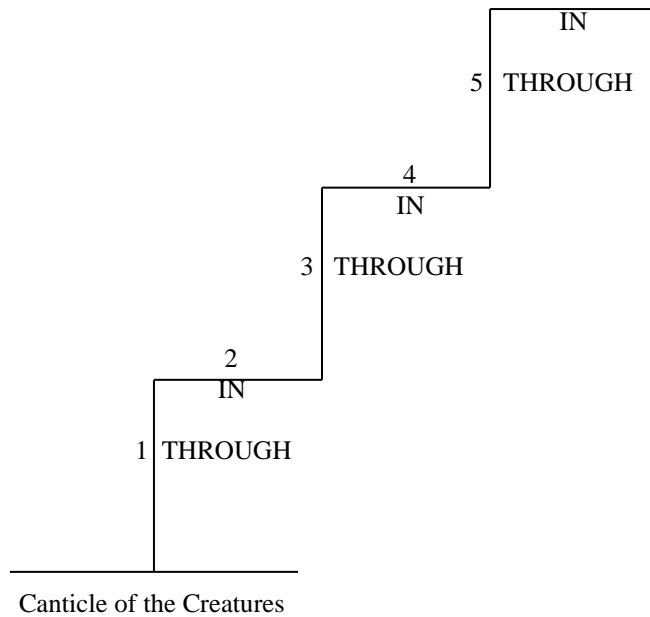
There will be a week of preparation before the retreat. This will include a brief history of the life of Saint Bonaventure. The Prologue of the Journey will be read, followed by open discussion on our desire for God and the cleansing of our interior mirror so that we may become clearer mirror images of the Holy Trinity, remembering how we were once made in the image and likeness of God. (Genesis 1:26-27). There will be discussion on the use of the eyes, the window to the soul, and on how the contemplation of God leads to an interior peace which surpasses all our understanding; "a peace the world cannot give." (John 14:27).

Finally, on the day before the retreat is due to begin, there will be a reading of *The Canticle of the Creatures*, followed by reflection and discussion on how Saint Francis of Assisi calls on all of creation to join in the song of praise to our Lord and God.

Throughout the week of preparation chart 1 will be on display. Though it shows the seven stages of the journey, the rest of the chart is left blank. This will hopefully arouse a curiosity in the novices and postulants; after all, the journey to God is in many ways an unknown, full of surprises. Thoughts, concerns, words or reflections, even fears may be added to the chart throughout the week.

Chart 1: To be put on display during the week of preparation

6  7



**THE SEVEN WEEK JOURNEY**

The retreatants will receive the appropriate chapter at the start of each week.

**Weeks 1 and 2**

During these two weeks, Evening Prayer will take place outside at dusk to watch the sunset and the light fading. This is to help visualise that the footprints of God as seen in nature mysticism are sometimes unclear, perhaps only dim shadows.

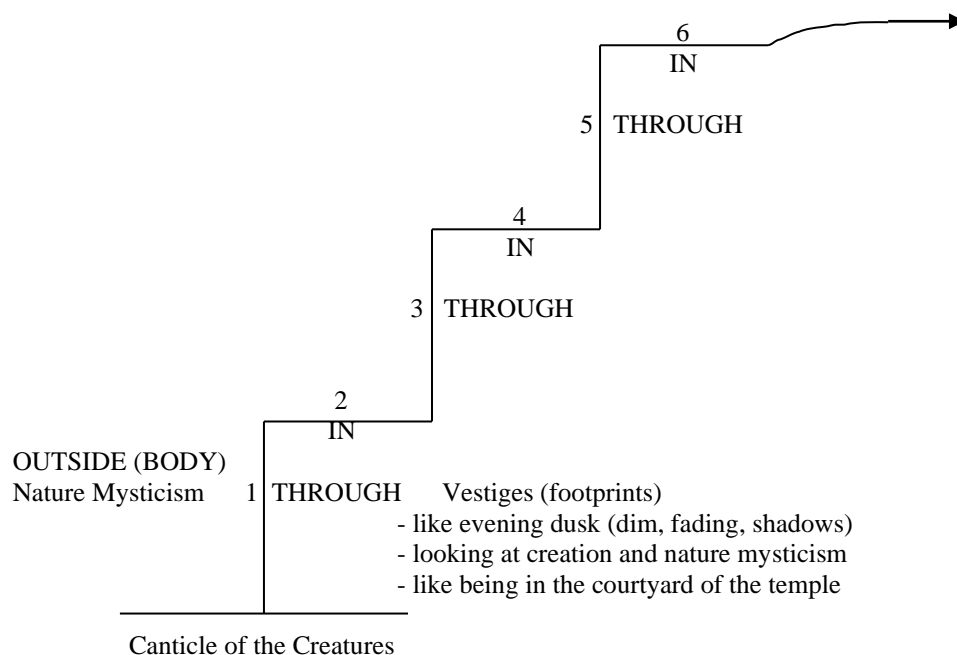
The focus for these two weeks is on nature mysticism, that which is outside and external, the material world and the body; hence the daytrips and the greater use of the external senses.

Chart 2 will be on display. Thoughts, words or reflections may be added to the chart throughout the two weeks.

**Week 1: Chapter One - The steps of the ascent into God and the reflection on God through the vestiges in the universe**

- Sun    READING CHAPTER, REFLECTION ON CHAPTER, DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER
- Mon    Contemplation of a flower.
- Tue    Discussion on whether the flower is opaque or transparent; in other words, though the flower is not God, are we able to see through the flower to the beauty of God? Are we able to look beyond the created to the creator; are we able to see God's reflection or footprint in the flower? (Matthew 6:25-34 on Trust in Providence may be of use).
- Wed    Daytrip to a place of natural beauty, perhaps an ocean view or mountain scenery.
- Thu    Discussion on the beautiful scenery and whether it is opaque or transparent. Is it just a beautiful view or does it tell us something about God's power, magnificence and splendour?
- Fri    Daytrip to a zoo.
- Sat    Discussion on the variety and uniqueness of the animals and wildlife; again are they opaque or transparent? Are we able to look through creation to our creator God?

Chart 2: To be put on display at the beginning of week 1



## Week 2: Chapter Two - The reflection on God in the vestiges in this sensible world

- Sun READING CHAPTER, REFLECTION ON CHAPTER, DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER  
During the previous week we tried to look through creation. Now we look at creation as it enters in our senses.
- Mon Sight. Draw or paint a picture of the place of natural beauty visited last week. This may be compared to photographs to show how memory may be flawed and how we are unable to fully absorb an awesome sight in the same way we are unable to fully absorb and comprehend the full depth of God.
- Tue Hearing. Listen to a piece of classical music in the morning, enjoying its peaceful harmony. Attempt to hum it back in the evening. This may demonstrate how imperfect memories are formed through imperfect senses.
- Wed Smell. Smelling and reflection on various fragrances, demonstrating how we make a judgement, either taking delight or not taking delight from creation entering our senses.
- Thu Taste. Eat something quickly and eat something slowly, whilst using or not using the sense of smell. This will demonstrate how the senses may need time to allow creation to enter in and it will show how the senses are often dependent on one another.
- Fri Touch. Try to identify different objects using only touch, and then gradually introducing the other four senses to identify the different objects. This will demonstrate the interdependency of the senses, showing how all five senses are needed to gain a more complete picture.
- Sat DAY OF REST

## Weeks 3 and 4

During these two weeks, Morning Prayer will take place outside at dawn to watch the sunrise and the light increasing. This is to help visualise that the contemplation of God through the soul and soul mysticism gives a clearer and brighter image than the contemplation of God through nature mysticism. This is because in all of nature, it is the human person that is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore the human soul is capable of giving a clearer reflection of our God.

The focus for these two weeks is on soul mysticism, that which is within and internal, the human soul; hence meeting people and reflection on Grace.

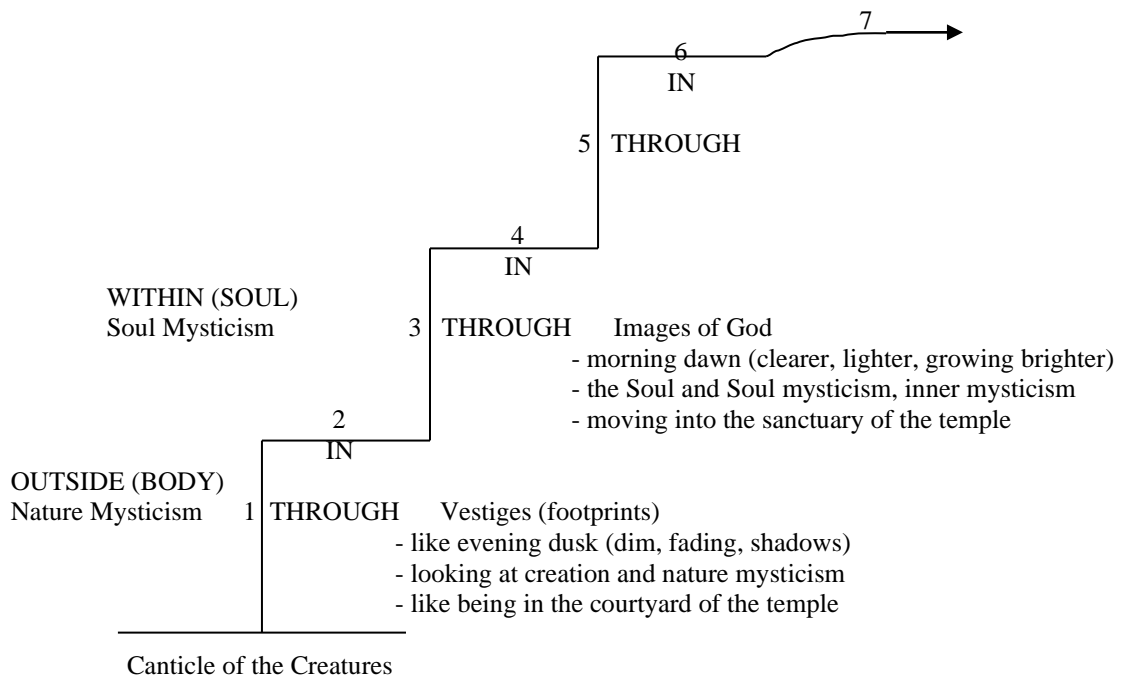
Chart 3 will be on display. Thoughts, words or reflections may be added to the chart throughout the two weeks. The charts from previous weeks will be left on display so that retreatants may look back over the journey so far. The journey is not necessarily continuous and linear. There may be movement

towards later stages or movement towards previous stages of the journey already passed through. It is important to be flexible and to allow the Spirit to lead us.

**Week 3: Chapter Three - The reflection on God through the image imprinted on our natural powers**

- Sun READING CHAPTER, REFLECTION ON CHAPTER, DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER
- Mon Memory to Eternity (Father). Visit a home for the elderly and listen to childhood memories.
- Tue Reflection and discussion on the previous day’s experience, including how the memory retains the past, present and future. It remembers changeless truths and goes on and on and on, becoming eternal. We reflect on how we are eternally in the memory of God. (Jeremiah 1:5).
- Wed Intellect to Truth (Word / Son). Listen to lectures from adult teachers on Christian truths.
- Thu Reflection and discussion on the previous day’s experience, including how the intellect understands the meaning of terms and words, how it comprehends the meaning of propositions and is able to grasp conclusions and the Truth. We reflect on how the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ is “full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14).
- Fri Will to Highest Good (Holy Spirit). Entertain a group of free spirited primary school children.
- Sat Reflection and discussion on the previous day’s experience, including how we are able to use the will to carefully deliberate before making a judgement that leads to a desire for the Highest Good. And how the Higher Good, the Spirit of love, the Spirit of truth “will lead you to the complete truth,” (John 16:13), and how the “truth will make you free.” (John 8:32). And how Memory, Intellect and Will when used together help to build up an image of God.

Chart 3: To be put on display at the beginning of week 3



**Week 4: Chapter Four - The reflection on God in the image reformed by the gifts of grace**

- Sun READING CHAPTER, REFLECTION ON CHAPTER, DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER
- Mon A reminder of our Baptismal Vows and the Graces we receive.
- Tue Faith. Reflection and discussion on the strength of faith and on the doubts and struggles often associated with faith. (Hebrews 11:1-40). We discuss how faith is often blind for “no one has ever seen God.” (John 1:18). We remember how previously we used the physical senses of sight and hearing to see and hear beauty and harmony. And now we build upon these physical

- senses with the eyes and ears of faith to help reach the perfection of the spiritual senses, so that we may gaze with admiration on the beauty and harmony of our God.
- Wed Hope. Reflection and discussion on hope and on the patience it brings during times of trial and suffering. (Romans 5:3-5). We remember how the physical sense of smell was used to experience soothing fragrances that may calm us during times of stress. And now we build upon the physical sense of smell, using the scent of hope to restore the perfection of the spiritual sense, so that we may experience with devotion the soothing fragrance of our God.
- Thu Love. Reflection and discussion on love and the commitment and work it requires, and how love is eternal. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). We remember how taste and touch were used to experience sweetness and delight. And now we build upon these physical senses with sweet and delightful love to help perfect our spiritual senses, so that we may rejoice with exultation in the sweetness and delight of our God. The film 'The Phantom of the Opera' may be shown to help demonstrate the importance of touch and the damage done to a person when they are deprived of touch and love.
- Fri A presentation on Mary, she is 'Full of Grace.' Mary is what God would be in all of us. She carried the Word of God in her womb; we are called to carry the Word of God in the womb of our hearts. She gave birth to the Word of God in the stable in Bethlehem; we are called to give birth to the Word of God in our good works. And how, when all humanity is full of Grace, "God may be all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:28).
- Sat DAY OF REST

### **Weeks 5 and 6**

During these two weeks, Midday Prayer will take place outside at noon when the sun is at its highest and its light is brightest. This is to help visualise the blinding light of God that we see as we contemplate the Divine Names of the Holy Trinity.

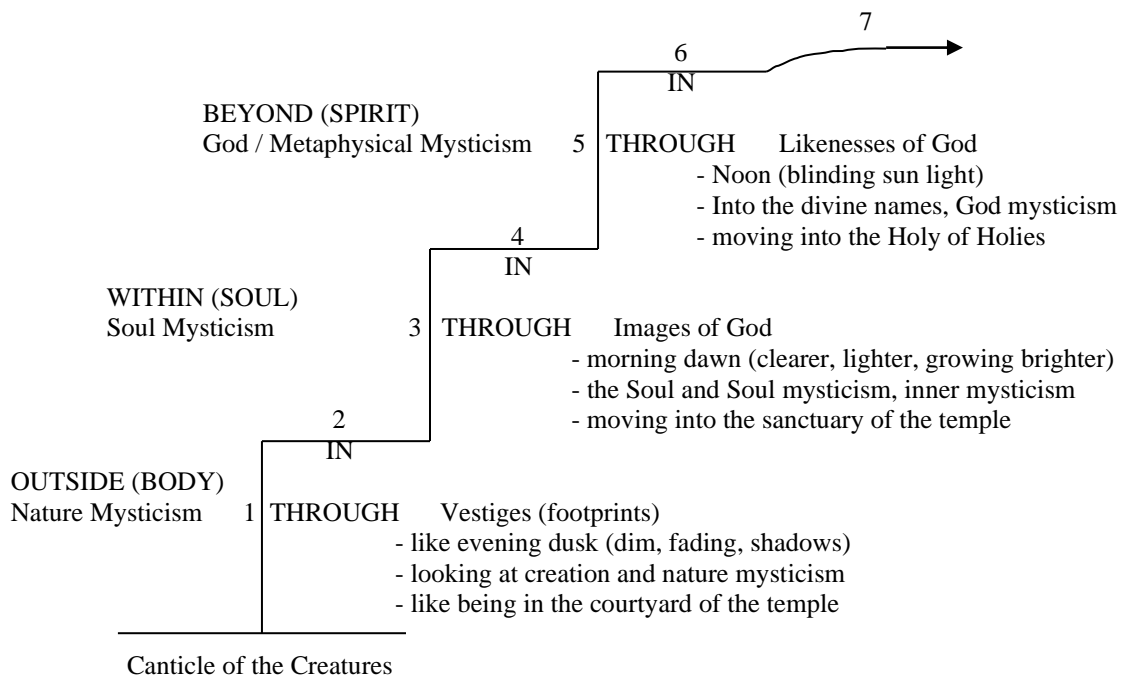
The focus for these two weeks is on God mysticism, the spiritual and that which is beyond; hence more quiet time for meditation and contemplation.

Chart 4 will be on display. Thoughts, words or reflections may be added to the chart throughout the two weeks.

### **Week 5: Chapter Five - The reflection on the divine unity through God's primary name, which is Being**

- Sun READING CHAPTER, REFLECTION ON CHAPTER, DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER  
Saint Francis of Assisi prayed "Who are you, Lord my God, and who am I?" This is the prayer that we will focus on throughout the week. For the first five days we pray "who are you Lord?" as we meditate on various passages from scripture.
- Mon You are Being. "I Am who I Am." (Exodus 3:14).
- Tue You are Good. "No one is good but God alone." (Luke 18:19).
- Wed You are Truth. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." (John 14:6).
- Thu You are Unity. "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19). We meditate on the unity of the Holy Trinity.
- Fri You are Beauty. "A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13). We meditate on the beauty of Jesus' love for us, and how the beauty of this spiritual love on the Cross is in contrast to the bitterness and ugliness of the physical suffering on the Cross.
- Sat We pray "Who am I Lord?" Not what I do, but who am I. It is only by knowing God that we come to know our own true self and the full dignity of the human person. I am made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Before God formed me in the womb God knew me; before I came to birth God consecrated me (Jeremiah 1:5). "Yahweh called me before I was born, from my mother's womb he pronounced my name." (Isaiah 49:1).

Chart 4: To be put on display at the beginning of week 5



**Week 6: Chapter Six - The reflection on the Most Blessed Trinity in its name, which is the Good**

- Sun READING CHAPTER, REFLECTION ON CHAPTER, DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER
- Mon The God of Love. Reflection and discussion on Saint Augustine’s image of the Holy Trinity as Love; where God the Father is the Lover, God the Son is the Beloved and God the Holy Spirit is Love itself flowing between the Father and Son.
- Tue God the Father. Contemplate God the Father, the “creator of heaven and earth” (The Apostles’ Creed), the ‘Fountain Fullness’ and infinite source of all goodness who is freely self-giving.
- Wed God the Son. Contemplate God the Son, the ‘Divine Exemplar,’ the full expression of the Father, the Word through whom “all things were created.” (Colossians 1:16).
- Thu God the Holy Spirit. Contemplate God the Holy Spirit, the ‘Breath of God,’ the “breath of life” (Genesis 2:7), and the free gift of God’s love to creation and humanity.
- Fri Reflection on how the perfect unselfish love and goodness of the Holy Trinity flows out into creation and is freely shared with humanity. And how God the Son, the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ to fully return all the love and goodness in creation perfectly back to the Father. And we are drawn to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit; bringing us into the unity of the Holy Trinity.
- Sat DAY OF REST

**Week 7**

Surrender of the whole human person, body, soul and spirit, to God; silence leading to solitude.

Chart 5 will be on display. Thoughts, words or reflections may be added to the chart, but not during the three days of silence. This is to prevent any distractions as we surrender ourselves wholly to God.

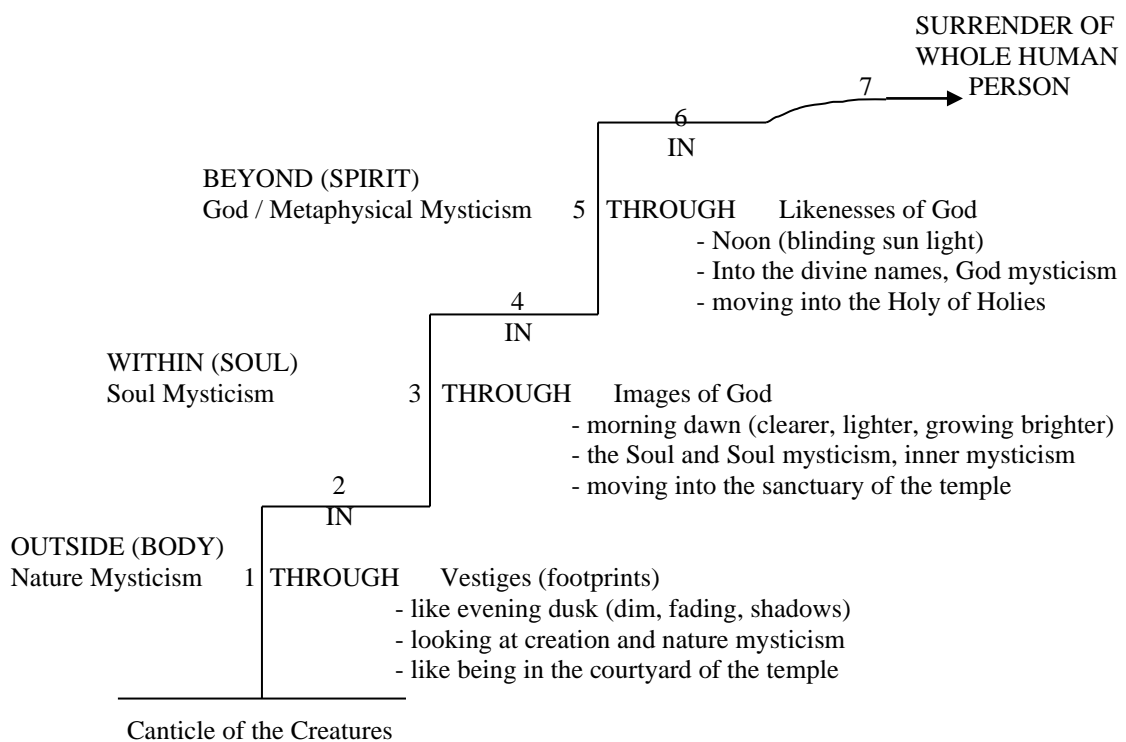
**Week 7: Chapter Seven - The mental and mystical transport in which rest is given to our understanding and through ecstasy our affection passes over totally into God**

- Sun READING CHAPTER, REFLECTION ON CHAPTER, DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER  
Words and knowledge can only take us so far, but the time will come when these will fail (1 Corinthians 13:8-12) and then we must surrender ourselves to God.
- Mon Daytrip to climb a mountain. We begin at the foot of the mountain with our desire to reach the top. We use all our senses as we climb the mountain, contemplating the ascent into God. At the top we rest before surrendering ourselves to God. (For those unable to climb they may

contemplate the ascent into God from the foot of the mountain, slowly raising their gaze from the base of the mountain along the route they would take to its peak, mirroring their own journey into God).

- Tue Visit a swimming pool with three diving boards at different heights representing the three steps of the journey as shown on the charts. As we climb the steps we reflect on the journey before taking the plunge. If we jump from the diving board it is a leap into the unknown, a passing over, surrendering to God as we fall into the silence and peace and darkness of the water below.
- Wed SURRENDER – SILENCE LEADING TO SOLITUDE
- Thu SURRENDER – SILENCE LEADING TO SOLITUDE
- Fri SURRENDER – SILENCE LEADING TO SOLITUDE
- Sat Final discussion on *The Journey of the Human Person into God*.

Chart 5: To be put on display at the beginning of week 7



<sup>1</sup> Copyright © 2005 Antony E. Jukes, OFM, English Province of the Immaculate Conception.

<sup>2</sup> For André Cirino, OFM (Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury). The version of *The Journey of the Human Person into God* is a recent translation by Zachary Hayes, OFM included in "The Journey Into God – a Forty Day Retreat with Bonaventure, Francis and Clare." Josef Raischl, SFO and André Cirino, OFM, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2002.