

DIRECTED RETREATS

A person makes a retreat in order to come closer to God in time of prayer, of privacy and peace, free from the ordinary occupations that consume so much of our time. Wanting to know God in the "HERE AND NOW", he or she moves away from it to see it better. Years have shown that this used to be done fairly well in group type retreats -- and for some people that is still the way. However, there is an increasing number of people who feel they need more than what the usual retreat schedule offers.

One answer is the individually directed retreat which is different from a private retreat. The individually directed retreat, which is enjoying a wide popularity just now, is based on a different format, with dynamics of its own. This type focuses on the personal prayer of an individual. We all know that God does not speak to us as if we were in an arena. He speaks to each one, and he speaks to this person where this person is at this particular time. The message might sound the same but each person's history and experience will prove a filter through which he or she will hear what is being said.

In this type of retreat the person sees the director at least once a day, in order to talk over what the person sees happening in his or her relationship to the Lord. The retreatant also receives material for the following day's prayer. The schedule could vary and sessions might be longer or shorter depending on the person making the retreat and the Director.

The entire experience is one of prayer and solitude when the retreatant is to be totally open to the Lord and to listen to His Word. This listening is helped by praying with Scripture, "letting the Word find a home in you." There is nothing magical about this experience and it requires work, effort and a deep level of faith from the retreatant. The number of prayer periods may vary with each retreatant. This rhythm allows for periods of time for reflective solitude and relaxation, all of which are necessary for serious attention in prayer.

The directed retreat is not limited to only priests and religious by any means. Since it is focused on the prayer experience of an individual it seems best suited to anyone who wishes to pray and to invest a good deal of time in prayer, according to the circumstances in which he or she lives.

One other thing applies to this type of retreat -- the ability to express oneself when trying to talk about one's prayer. A person need not be eloquent but a normal ability to talk about "God in my life" is important, since the director's role is to be a "translator" for the one making the retreat. The role of the Director is mainly one of listening in a deep and faith-centered way, and being of support to the retreatant as he or she struggles to express and to understand the movement of the Spirit. In this mode of sharing, the retreatant gains insights and understandings in the holy process of growing in the God relationship...of becoming another Christ.

SOME GENERAL ATTITUDES AND GUIDELINES CONCERNING A DIRECTED
RETREAT

1. A Directed Retreat is a time that we set aside to search INWARDLY.
2. It is a time to risk OPENNESS TO SELF AND TO GOD...His presence within us.
3. It is a time to grow in understanding ourselves; our gifts and deep fears, and thus a time to grow in inner freedom.
4. One should enter into the retreat with preparation. We should come to the retreat with our personal questions. We should have a sense of "where I am in my personal faith-life at this point in time."
5. We should approach the retreat with a sense of TRUST. Trust in God, in self, and in the director.
6. The environment for a meaningful retreat should be one of solitude. For it is in the quiet that we can listen deeply to ourselves, and to our God, who is present with us, at the very core of our beings.
7. OUR PRAYER should be intense (at least 4 periods per day) and the reflective time should center in on "my personal questions." The Scripture readings should be used as the way of entering into our deepest selves. The Word should become Life within each of us. It is in the mode of "deep listening" that we grow in wisdom and understanding.
8. The Retreat Director is present as a guide and support to the retreatant. We many times need the presence of another in order to understand ourselves. Verbalizing our prayer experiences is very helpful in the art of self-understanding.
9. It is important that we approach retreat with deep faith and confidence in ourselves. In Christ Jesus we are redeemed, and with His Presence and care, we do have the grace to grow in holiness. For it is the vocation of each Christian to BECOME like unto Christ!
10. We are called upon to GO BEYOND THE RATIONAL! We must be open to MYSTERY and those new and creative insights that are awaiting birth from within. Retreat is a time of new

birth!

11. Finally, retreat is a time to re-affirm our DIRECTION in life. Each of us has a unique call, and it takes patience and courage to be open to "my Way". But this is what the challenge of Life is all about; but more importantly, it is only in openness to "my call" that I will that deep joy and peace of soul that is promised to those who follow Christ.

WE ARE A PEOPLE CALLED TO BE COMMUNITY FOR ONE ANOTHER AND FOR THE WORLD. IT IS IN FINDING GOD'S PRESENCE AMONG US THAT WE FIND THE WAY TO HARMONY AND LIFE. THIS PROCESS HAS TO FIRST OF ALL BEGIN IN THE SILENCE OF EACH OF US, FOR WE CANNOT GIVE WHAT WE DO NOT HAVE. WE ARE A PEOPLE EVOLVING TOWARDS OUR GOD, AND IT IS AN EVOLUTION CENTERED IN LOVE. WE ARE A PEOPLE WHOSE VOCATION IT IS TO "BECOME LIKE GOD".