

RETREAT

Why go on retreat? Who needs a retreat? What happens on retreat? The answer to these questions will make it clear why retreats are a moral necessity for every Catholic. Don't wait till you're retirement age! (You might not get there!)

God is necessarily hidden. Although He reveals Himself to everyone, not everyone recognizes Him every time, not even people who think they know Him.

St. Mary Magdalene, who knew our Lord well and who had come to Him with all the ardour of her faith, did not recognize Him immediately after His resurrection-she even mistook Him for a gardener. Jesus had to awaken something in her (by calling her by name, "Mary") for her finally to recognize Him. The same blindness struck the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and Jesus had to open first their minds by explaining the Scriptures, and then their hearts by giving them a special grace at the breaking of bread, until they finally recognized Him. Then, just like St. Mary Magdalene, they were filled with joy and fervour.

Another example that is particularly revealing is that of St. Teresa of Avila. When she was very young, she burned with such a desire to be a martyr for the love of God that she ran away from her father's home to be found later several miles away. She consecrated herself to God in the religious life, but rather than nourishing her devotion by meditation, she fed herself on conversation with people from the world outside the convent. Our Lord appeared to her two times before she finally set herself to serving God as she should.

How many good Catholics read their own experience in these examples? Clearly, we cast no doubt on their initial zeal or the fervour of the newly converted, but are their faith and hope still,

and at every moment, in perfect harmony with Jesus crucified-something lacking in the disciples of Emmaus? Or truly detached from human consolation-something lacking in Mary Magdalene? Or well nourished on contemplation-something lacking in Teresa of Avila? Aren't the causes of spiritual suffocation put before us today with even greater cunning, sweetly forced upon us by the world?

God offers His love to all men but not all of them answer Him as they should. Without mentioning the sinners who simply turn away, the examples used above show clearly that a love that is not quite true goes hand in hand with a lukewarm faith.

Teresa of Avila still loved the world too much, the disciples on the road to Emmaus were scandalized by the Passion and saw in the Cross nothing but a failure, and even Mary Magdalene herself had a love that was too human, since Jesus asked her not to touch Him anymore, whereas before it had always been permitted. What, then, can be said of us, even the most devoted? Above all, perhaps, the most active?

That is the first reason to go on retreat-to nourish our devotion, our love of God, and our fervour in doing His will, by the thought of His mysteries and the consideration of our own state, by listening for His call and meditating on what He has said to us. Let no one say they don't need this nourishment: how can anyone possibly say that who has not tasted it? How many people come back from retreat saying, "If I had only known that sooner!"

Let no one say, either, that they already have enough of a spiritual life, and that a retreat would be useless for them. Two years before his death, Archbishop Lefebvre followed a 30 day retreat. Even Carmelites make an annual retreat. St. Francis of Assisi advised his religious to go off to a hermitage alone from time to time, and he asked one of the brothers to put himself at his service-like the brothers of our retreat houses at the service of retreatants-so that nothing would distract him.

These general reasons to go on retreat are seconded by reasons that are particular to each individual.

The lukewarm are those who most need a retreat. The hallmark of charity is a real and active love, which means the eagerness and fervour with which we seek to serve God. As soon as we begin to serve Him, He gives Himself to us, which draws us to love Him more, so that our love is always progressing. "Charity can never be on vacation," we are told by St. Augustine. That is why, as soon as we become satisfied with a certain degree of charity, we know that our charity is being smothered. Since charity is not just one more factor in our spiritual life but rather is our spiritual life itself, then we understand that smothering our charity quickly means suffocation and death.

Who Needs a Retreat?

Since lukewarmness is characterized by a certain carelessness and irresponsibility, that is to say, by a certain unawareness, as opposed to a sudden, brutal fall which obviously does not go unnoticed, we can understand why all spiritual writers treat the lukewarm as seriously as they treat hardened sinners.

I would thou wert cold, or hot. But since thou art lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest: I am rich, and made wealthy [in spiritual things], and [therefore] have need of nothing: and knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Apoc. 3:15-17).

1) That is the reason a retreat is normally the only way to break out of lukewarmness. with preaching to enlighten the soul, a good confession, the advice of the priest in the role of doctor, and good resolutions-all repeated until the patient is cured, hence the necessity to go not on one retreat, but on regular retreats.

2) All those who have received a mission in life need retreats. for that is normally the context in which God gives His orders. Those who have received a mission, besides bishops and priests, are parents. The mission of parents is thought to be easy because it is ordinary, but whose nobility and gravity are often understood only when it's too late. It is a collaboration with God in His work of sanctification, much greater than the collaboration in His work of bodily creation. The apostolates of fatherhood and motherhood are missions for which we should seek divine counsel even before God chooses to give them.

All those who, in one way or another, desire to bring about the reign of Christ the King have received or taken on a mission. It is no small thing to be ambassador, minister, officer, or soldier of Christ the King. We ought to tremble at the thought of failing to be true to this mission. For the mission of the ambassador, of the minister, and all the others, can be none other than the mission of Christ who was sent to earth to do the will of His Father. He tells us very clearly during His agony that the will of His Father is that that He suffer and die on the Cross. "Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass far from Me. But no. May Thy will be done!"

The wisdom of God is to reign by the Cross. Whoever would call down His kingdom in any other way has a serious need to meditate on the true wisdom of God, far from all noise and activity. And whoever has already understood, understands that he still loves the Cross but poorly and that he sorely needs the grace of God.

3) The third category of people who need a retreat are those who are most dear to the Heart of Jesus. These are those whom He grants to suffer with Him; those who suffer in their body and above all in their soul; who suffer at having loved God so little or so poorly; who fear that life be too short

for redemption. These suffer that Jesus and Mary be so poorly loved and so hated. They need to taste the goodness of God, to stop and contemplate it, to savour it, and so discover that God gives them a foretaste of Heaven while still on earth. For St. Thomas teaches us that joy is always the fruit of meditation, following the words of the psalmist: "I remembered God, and I rejoiced."

4) The final category of those who need a retreat is adolescents. We ask them to do their duty, to serve God, to desire the good and accomplish it, but how can they possibly do so if they do not know what that means? Certainly, they ought to obey in trusting their parents, but that is true primarily for young childhood. When a young man leaves his father and mother, what will he do if he does not have the light in himself? How will he ever guide others if, by ill fortune, he finds himself a blind man leading the blind?

St. Thomas explains in his *Summa Theologica* in answer to the question, "Whether contemplation or meditation is the cause of devotion [in the service of God]?"

The extrinsic and chief cause of devotion is God [hence the importance of having faith in grace]. But the intrinsic cause on our part must needs be meditation or contemplation. For...devotion is an act of the will to the effect that man surrenders himself readily to the service of God. Now every act of the will proceeds from some consideration, since the object of the will is a good understood. [We do not desire what we do not know and it is the job of the intellect to show the will whether a thing is good or *evil*.-Ed] Wherefore Augustine says (*De Trin.*, ix, 2; xv, 23) that "the will arises from the intelligence."