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BREATHING SPELL

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Individual spiritual direction, of which retreats have had the whole-hearted cooperation of the local clergy; of His Excellency Bishop Hekey during whose episcopate they were inaugurated, of the late Bishop O'Hern of happy memory, and of the present Ordinaries, dentists, brokers, bankers, and real-estate agents, and often are willing to pay heavily for the advice they get, yet when it comes to their souls, the most precious asset they have, they seem to take it for granted that they can get along without direction or consultation. As most of them are satisfied to ask an occasional question in the confessional about a problem of conscience. They do not realize that they need very positive and specific guidance and assistance about how to make their prayer well, how to receive the Sacraments more fruitfully, how to grow in the spiritual life, how, especially, to meet the particular difficulties associated with their age, occupation or environment. A retreat affords a splendid chance for just such guidance. The retreat master is at the service of the retreatants precisely for purpose of this kind, and they can have expert spiritual advice suited to their individual needs, and as much of it as they desire or require, without inconvenience, embarrassment or expense.

Historically retreats have always been made by men of good will. Our Lord's forty days of prayer on the threshold of His public career was a retreat. The ten days passed by the Apostles before Pentecost was a retreat. Retreats are no novelty in the Church though in modern times they have been systematized and popularized, and houses have been established where, relieving from the distractions of the world, men might spend a few days concentrating on their relations with their God.

In the United States the movement extends back about a quarter of a century and it got its initial inspiration not from the clergy but from small bands of earnest Catholic laymen. It is to the credit of the Reverend Terence Shealy, S.J., that the first house in the country devoted exclusively to men's retreats was opened on September 8, 1911, at Mount Mansera, Staten Island. The first instance of a permanent organization for the promotion of retreats was probably the establishment of "The Loyola," some seven years earlier at Santa Clara, California, a group that today sponsors "El Retiro San Inigo" at Los Altos. Not to mention innumerable places where opportunities are offered for summer retreats, we have now in the United States twenty-five centers where retreats for men are held all the year around. The newest is that of Monte Alverno, solemnly dedicated at Appleton, Wis., last June.

Undoubtedly the depression through which we have just passed retarded the movement, but recently it has gained a new impetus. During 1934 the Malvern (Philadelphia) retreat house reported an attendance of 3,750 men and this year, up to June, retreatants at Mount Saint Catherine, Moorlinton, N. J., a house, incidentally, that was the generous benefaction of an individual zealous layman, Mr. Welcome W. Bender, had passed the thousand mark. In mid-August some 1,200 men gathered at Notre Dame University for the one retreat offered there annually. It might be noted that not a few non-Catholics attend all the retreat houses.

Here in Rochester the retreat movement dates from 1915 when thirty-five men gathered for a retreat conducted by the Reverend Joseph Mulry, S.J. Since then they have been annual affairs at St. Bernard's Seminary, twice in 1930 and 1931, the attendance topped the two hundred mark. Retreatants this summer numbered 167, notably from Rochester itself, Auburn, Elmira, Geneva, Hornell, Lima and Ithaca. Men of every age and condition of life, colored as well as white, have assisted at the retreats, and the verdict about the retreats, which has been unanimously favorable, from their inception to

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The great religious orders not alone preached but exercised and distributed charity. Europe speaks in civilized language because they who love the Mass interpreted that love into men and made the Eucharist the place where God and man meet and where men meet their fellows in love and sympathy. Saint Vincent de Paul was the great lover of the poor because he ardently loved and offered the Holy Sacrifices of the Mass.

The vastly extended, complicated organizations of Catholic charity today are but the increased offer of the Mass. To understand Catholic charity we must understand Bethlehem and Calvary, which are the revelation of how God first loved us and delivered for us into death His only Beloved Son. Excerpt from the address delivered by the Apostolic Delegate at the National Conference of Catholic Charities.