

Priest Explains What a Retreat is All About

By
FATHER RICHARD MORAN

A retreat is NOT something out of this world.

It shares nothing in common with those chubby little winged figures painted high on the ceiling of your parish church and commonly called angels. Nor is it a whiff of the sulfurous fumes of hell, so graphically described by some missionaries as to give the impression they had been to hell and had come back. Neither is a retreat a hair-raising phenomenon or a soul-searching session.

A retreat is something very much of this world. It smacks of the stuff of all human experiences . . . something living and dynamic. By way of definition, one could say that a retreat is an experience with TIME and PLACE which are best suited to give a man a chance to THINK PRAYERFULLY.

Advertising men tell us that never before has man had so much time on his hands, with shorter working hours, etc. Yet the 20th century has robbed man of time for himself by forcing him to work two or three jobs to make provision for tomorrow.

"Rush" is the mood of his daily life, and the familiar "rat-race" setting. The structure of daily living, the institutions of man, the 20th century attitudes prevalent have all squeezed time from man like water from a kitchen sponge. For most men, each day is just another identical, rounded, eventless day, packed neatly against the previous ones like another saucer added to a rack.



A new element in modern-day retreats is the open discussion.

A Retreat Makes Time
 A retreat pulls the plug out of electric clocks and jams the main spring of mechanical ones. Only the bell ringer on a retreat needs a timepiece, and even he can use a sundial to keep the men on an order of events.

On a retreat, the schedule is made for man and not man for schedule. Time is plenty for reading, or for dialogue while eating, or for kicking in the woods alone, or for kicking up the dust in the field with one's own thoughts.

As for place, a retreat is another world. An UNHURRIED

world. A quiet world where a man becomes acutely aware of almost forgotten sounds like the click of his own heel on a garden path, or the snap of a twig breaking under his foot in the woods, or the snapping of a curtain against his opened window in the morning.

It is a world without telephone, newspapers or television; where a man can doff a business suit, and slip into casual slacks and sport shirt. In order to THINK PRAYERFULLY. He can let his brain work undisturbedly. A night alone in a motel could provide a man with some solitude but

under ordinary circumstances, most men wouldn't do this, nor would they have God's Word presented to them there, as they would have while on a retreat.

For thinking prayerfully means having the time and the place so geared that a man may not only hear God's Word, but also listen to it. It's a chance to look at the truths of life as presented through the Word of God. A man has a chance to get to know himself, his God, and other people in his life, for example, his wife and his children.

How many men bother to stop

and realize who they are? Do they ever bother to take the time and be in a place so geared that they can recognize themselves in the confused picture of the morning headlines? How often do men stop to dig down deeply into the nucleus that is "themselves" and discover who they really are?

Man has the sense today that he is the lord of creation. That's some lordship when he's going almost out of his mind trying to keep the breadbox full in order to live! Another axiom is that man is the master of his home. Yet his children were

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most likely born in a hospital, and due to work, he has probably spent almost half of his marriage away from his wife and children. Some master!

To Know God Better
 A retreat provides a man with the time and place to get to know his God. Who is God anyway? Infinity? The only infinity a 20th century man knows is that last notch on the viewfinder of his Kodak camera.

What is God like? Who is that "Our Father" to whom Jesus told him to pray? Does man know the God he worships Sunday after Sunday? What possible meaning can words like "Omniscience" and "Omnipotence" and "Omnipresence" have for modern day man who knows only relationships from the world of science with which he daily comes in contact. And is he content to sit Sunday after Sunday muttering those words over and over again . . . "Our Father, who art in heaven . . . ?"

Anyone who thinks man can know God from a five or ten minute sermon on a Sunday is just not living life as it is lived today; what with our production-line Masses and parking problems. Only a retreat, or something like it, can give man the luxury of time and place to get to know God.

New Look at Family
 And only a retreat can aid man, by giving him time and place, to get a deeper knowledge of his wife and children

who live under the same roof with him.

To many men, a wife is only so much blood, flesh, bone and cartilage. Their eyes see only weight, height, shape and color. They do not constantly discover that aspect of their wives, the intangible, the spiritual element, which makes their wives so different from all the other women in a parish, or in a town or on a street.

In many ways the 20th century way of life forces a man to take his children for granted. It keeps a man from constantly knowing his children in their various stages of growth.

A son may feel like a stranger in his father's house or a daughter may want to go "visit her girlfriend" whenever her father comes home. When I asked one teenage boy at Notre Dame, "Does your father love you?" his answer was: "My father doesn't even know I exist!"

A retreat supplies a man with time to think and a place away from it all, to recognize again that young woman at home who only yesterday was a little girl in pigtails.

Life has a design and a weave to it as orderly as the one in a man's suit. A retreat gives a man the time to perceive the design and the place to be still and observe the weave. Life also has a melody to it. Only on a retreat does a man give himself a chance, with time and place, to listen to the melody and get to know that melody so that he can whistle it for others . . . like his wife and children.

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