
Jesus said to the apostles, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.’ (Mark 6: 31-32)

We tend to think that the hyperactivity of modern life is a recent affliction. This glimpse of the apostles not even taking a working lunch is a clear reminder that people have always been prone to being overtaken by daily demands.

What is a ‘Retreat’?

The word retreat means to go back. On a Retreat you step back from the busyness of life, not in order to get away but to move towards God.

The idea of giving time to allow ourselves to be restored in this way is not a new one. Jesus himself often did it (see e.g. Luke 6: 12, 9: 18) and he clearly expected his disciples to do the same. In Mark 6, he did not even give them a choice; he told them to do it.

‘To be truly alone with the Lord, even for a moment, will leave us changed for ever...’

The purpose wasn’t to escape from busyness, even though that would no doubt have been very welcome. The purpose was to withdraw from the things that prevented them from focusing their attention on him.

These days we often hear talk of ‘me-time’. That isn’t what Retreats are about. They are about ‘God-time’ – giving time to engage with the Lord in ways that our busy lives don’t normally allow, and taking the time to allow him to refresh us. To be truly alone with the Lord, even for a moment, will leave us changed for ever, and while this can feel unsettling, it is above all wonderfully liberating.

What happens?

One of the most important ingredients is quietness. That is partly lack of noise, but it’s also being inwardly as well as outwardly still.

So Retreats are often spent at least partly ‘in silence’, that is, not talking as far as is possible and sensible.

There may well be other people with you on Retreat and it may at first feel strange not to speak to them, but you soon realize that being in Retreat with them is ‘being alone with God, but doing it together.’

Different kinds of Retreat

There are many different ways of making a Retreat.

RETREATS FOR GROUPS

can take the simple form of a series of addresses – usually on a theme – by the retreat conductor, with time inbetween them for prayer and reflection.

Group Retreats may also be based around painting, walking, music, poetry, a garden, or indeed anything which can lead into prayer. The common features will always be



to encourage the awareness of the Lord’s presence by recovering inner stillness.

In any group Retreat, the conductor will be available for individuals to consult.

RETREATS FOR INDIVIDUALS

usually take the form of an individually guided Retreat (an IGR). In these, each person meets separately and confidentially each day with the retreat-giver.

The times between meetings with the retreat-giver are partly spent in prayer; they may also include activities like painting or walking – or even catching up on sleep! Usually reading is rationed or left aside altogether to give heart and soul a chance to hear what God may be saying in someone’s inner prayer.

What is right for you?

The fact that you are reading this suggests that the Lord is probably already calling you to spend more time in quiet with him.

The kind of Retreat you make depends on lots of things. Jesus’ first words to the disciples in St John’s Gospel are, ‘What are you looking for?’ (John 1: 38). It is

worth asking that question when looking for a Retreat.

Are you tired, and simply need to rest with Jesus? Are you facing a life-changing decision and need to reflect and sort it out? Do you long for some spiritual 'peace and quiet', or is it that you are feeling drawn more deeply into prayer and need some special time to allow it to develop?

It could be any of these, or something else. When you have begun to think about this, your parish priest, spiritual director, or diocesan spirituality adviser can help you find the right way ahead.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Retreat Association
(www.retreats.org.uk) annually publishes a magazine *Retreats* with information on places you can make a Retreat and their facilities.

The Society of Retreat Conductors
(www.thesrc.org.uk) can offer help both in choosing a Retreat and in meeting the cost.

**In returning and
rest you shall
be saved; in
quietness
and in trust shall
be your strength.**

Isaiah 30: 15, NRSV

Making a Retreat

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