

THE DIRECTED RETREAT

The Directed Retreat, according to the Spiritual Exercises, is an essential part of our CLC way of life. A few points to ponder before the retreat...

The retreat is a graced time of personal encounter with God - a time of silence, refreshment and healing. It is often referred to as "a journey into the desert", where God can speak to your heart.

A retreat may extend over a short period such as 3 to five days for beginners, the traditional 8 days, or the full experience of the Spiritual Exercises during 30 days. Whatever the period, it is a time when the Holy Spirit is at work!

Looking forward to the retreat, there is usually a special grace that you will be seeking - a God-given desire starting to well up in your heart. In the days before the retreat try to be conscious of slowing down, praying to the Holy Spirit for an open generous heart in order to allow this desire to surface.

Although you are choosing solitude, you will never be alone. God's love will surround you as well as the prayers of those making the retreat with you, your director, the community and friends at home. Before going into silence at the beginning of the retreat, usually on the first evening, practical details will be discussed such as times for meals, Mass and spiritual direction etc. You will meet your director each day for about 45 minutes and he/she will suggest how to divide your individual prayer and free time, according to your special needs. Usually there are 4 to 5 hours of prayer but this is flexible.

You should try to be gentle with yourself, relaxing into the silence and respecting the "space" of those on retreat with you. If anyone is in need or trouble, she should turn to God and the director rather than interrupt the prayer of her "companions". Pray for openness to trust the journey and respect the healing

silence, avoiding the temptation to talk or whisper unnecessarily and avoiding any compulsive activity, phone calls, letter-writing, extra reading etc. Instead, take simple exercise such as walks in nature and do gentle handwork/art. Normally the only books you will need are your bible and journal.

After the retreat, it is advisable to come out of silence gradually - gently becoming re-acquainted with one another and the noise of everyday life. It's best to avoid excitable conversation and sharing. Rather savour and ponder the graces received. You will be able to share the fruits of your retreat at a later stage.

So, put yourselves into the loving hands of Our Lord, allowing Our Lady and the St Ignatius to pave the way!

AFTER THE RETREAT

Some Thoughts and suggestions to consider after the retreat ...

It is not unusual, after the retreat, for a person to be filled with doubts about what happened on retreat. It is helpful to be aware that this can happen so that you can deal with negative thoughts and feelings.

Remember to hold onto the treasure, the blessings and the gifts of the retreat. The evil one wants you to doubt the truth of your encounter with God. God's touch is often too tender and gentle for any words and it's easy when faced with the demands of the 'real' world, to think that His presence is neither the truth nor real.

So if you do feel discouraged and afraid, here are some suggestions that will help you to stand firm:

- Don't stop praying ... pray more! Even if you don't feel like it.
- If you made any decisions during the retreat, stick to them.
- Stay calm and try to look for the cause of your desolate feelings.
- Remember that a grateful heart is more able to respond to God's intentions. So give thanks for the blessings received.
- And be patient ... as you open your heart to God's healing love, you will realize that He has not left you and never will.

Pray Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 v 16 – 21

This then is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name:

Out of his infinite glory, may He give you the power through His Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints Have the strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.

Glory beto Him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.