

RETREATING

A time away to walk closer with God

In the military a “retreat” is a time to leave the battle, regroup, and then reengage the enemy. Likewise, in our spiritual journey we retreat from daily concerns and activities for rest and time alone with God. A retreat allows us the time and space to be in touch with God, reflect on changes we need to make in our lives, get reenergized, and refocus on God’s call to us.

So it was with Abraham and Sarah, who left the “*house of his father and his kindred*” to become a great people for God. This was also true of Moses, who was strengthened and prepared by God for the great task before him during forty years of desert shepherding. Jesus often retreated for prayer and fellowship with His Father, particularly when He faced significant challenges and decisions or when He needed a time to reenergize Himself. The Disciples retreated to the Upper Room after Jesus’ Ascension and waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit. We know that the monks of the 3rd century and beyond retreated to the desert to be closer to God. Throughout the history of the church, the saints have found that prayer, sacrifice, and listening to God came easier away from the demands and noise of everyday life. St. Ignatius has provided encouragement and a model for retreating.

St. Ignatius of Loyola

As a soldier and disciple, Ignatius knew the benefit of retreating. He advised his followers to use the “retreat” as a means to come away from the ordinary and to put oneself into the hands of God, in order to be re-energized, renewed, and more in sync with God’s will for their lives.

Ignatius of Loyola was born of Spanish nobility at the end of the Middle Ages (1491 A.D.). He was destined for a military career, but a cannon ball changed all that. During his long convalescence to heal his broken leg, he was forced to retreat from his normal life. Provided with the Gospels (not the romances he had requested) and “The Golden Legend”, by Bishop Jacques de Voragine, he came to see the mercy of God working powerfully in the saints of old. These stories touched his soul. As he recovered, he was changed and determined to dedicate his life to Christ and the building of God’s Kingdom. He came to see that decisions which led to service, required discipline and strength of spirit. He called his process of decision-making “*discernment of spirits,*” which was a special discipline that enabled a follower of Jesus to walk the talk of discipleship.

Once Ignatius recovered from his wounds, he spent eight months as a hermit at Manresa, Spain, where he wrote his “Spiritual Exercises,” now the ‘guide book’ for those discerning how to follow the calling and direction of God in one’s life. Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises are organized to focus on the Gospels and to allow their message to facilitate a closer walk with Jesus through meditation, self-examination, and personal action in faith.

