



Retreat Like a Saint

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In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (see Matthew 5:43-48). Jesus’ example of loving his enemies and praying for his persecutors while they crucified him reveals the lofty ideal of Christian perfection. Jesus’ urging in Matthew’s Gospel is synthesized by the New Commandment in Saint John’s Gospel:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Countless saints throughout the centuries have inspired us by striving for this lofty ideal, despite the degree of difficulty due to our concupiscent human nature (see 1 John 2:16). Like Jesus, Saint Katharina Kasper and those who were canonized with her, lived as “those who passed from observance of laws to the gift of self,” said Pope Francis during her canonization Mass. True to his Ignatian Spirituality, Pope Francis compares the human heart to a magnet. Either the heart will love God or love the world’s treasures; only one can be chosen.

Of the created world, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the careful planner of the Spiritual Exercises, give us the following encouragement:

“All the things in this world are gifts of God, created for us, to be the means by which we can come to know him better, love him more surely, and serve him more faithfully. As a result, we ought to appreciate and use these gifts of God insofar as they help us toward our goal of loving service and union with God. But insofar as any created things hinder our progress toward our goal, we ought to let them go.”

In our culture today, there are plenty of temptations that hinder our progress toward God. Thankfully, we don’t have to rely on our own strength in moments of temptation because God’s grace is given to those whose hearts are disposed to receive it. How then do we dispose our hearts to receive God’s grace to reject the treasures of the world for the love of God and neighbor? Just like the saints that have gone before us we must step away from the world and dedicate concentrated time to examine our habits of self-love in place of loving God and neighbor and promoting the common good. Then aspire, with God’s light, to make the resolutions to activate the latter while arresting the former. We call this dedicated time for self-examination and resolution making, a retreat.

Time away from our daily activities for a period helps grant the distance we need in order to reflect upon our habits that reveal our embracing of the world's treasures, as demonstrated by our self-love. With the help of faith and guidance of a spiritual companion or director, we receive encouragement to make the necessary resolutions to love God and neighbor more faithfully.

There are many ways one could make a retreat, but all retreats should consist of at least the following criteria. First, a retreat should be scheduled at a place and time when you can dedicate yourself to silent meditation. In our information age, silence is hard to come by but necessary to hear God's appeal to the human heart. Lastly, a schedule should be created that includes one-hour of silent meditation for every four hours of retreat time.

Silent meditation should begin by making an act of faith towards God, the object of our prayer, followed by slowly reading passages from Sacred Scripture or a different spiritual book of your choice or by looking upon a sacred object or a place within created nature, until your mind grabs a hold of something to consider. During this time, speak with God about your thoughts, feelings, and affections towards God. Remember, and this is key, focus on any spiritual reading or sacred images or an object of nature as the means for beginning to speak to God from the heart. Lastly, journal your experiences directly after your times of meditation. Be sure to schedule time with a spiritual companion or director with whom you can freely share your meditation experiences. They will help you to confirm the best resolutions to make towards loving God and neighbor more faithfully. Finally, you don't have to wait until you are on retreat to experience this form of prayer. A retreat becomes more fruitful when this method of prayer is practiced daily for shorter periods of time, such as 15 minutes.

To schedule a retreat with Lindenwood Retreat & Conference Center, call 574-935-1780 or visit www.lindenwood.org. Private retreat, group retreat, or sponsored group retreats available.