

# What is a spiritual retreat?

A retreat is a days-long break to spend time with God in silence and prayer. It's a privileged opportunity to grow in love for God, to come to know ourselves better, and to know Him more deeply. It is a time to renew our faith, welcome the Holy Spirit's light, and calmly and thoughtfully explore the areas in which we can move forward in our Christian life.

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“What are you and I going to do during these days of retreat?” St. Josemaría once wondered aloud, and then answered: “We are going to be with our Lord a lot, to look for him, like Peter, in order to have an intimate conversation with him. Notice that I say ‘conversation’: a dialogue between two people, face to face, without hiding behind anonymity. We need that personal prayer, that intimacy, that direct contact with God our Lord” (Notes from a meditation, 25 February 1963).

The retreat revolves around the Eucharist. Holy Mass is celebrated in the oratory every day, as well as opportunities to pray the Stations of the Cross, time for a personal examination of conscience, and preached meditations, or guided prayer, to inspire conversations with God about the reality of Christian life. “Christian life does not lead us to

identify ourselves with an idea, but with a person: with Jesus Christ. For faith to shed light on our steps, besides asking ourselves, ‘Who is Jesus Christ for me?’ let us think, ‘Who am I for Jesus Christ?’” (Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz Braña, *In the Light of the Gospel*).

The schedule also usually includes a daily talk on Christian virtues, the Holy Rosary, spiritual reading, and ample time for personal reflection or conversation with the people guiding the retreat or with the priest.

What else? No more... and no less. There are no “special effects.” The priest tries to prepare the meditations well in order to present the life of Jesus Christ in an attractive way. Some people may stress the importance of taking notes, supplementing the general schedule with a spiritual book about a topic of particular interest, or making

resolutions... But all that is up to the personal preference of each person on the retreat.

The key is silence. St. Teresa of Calcutta said that “silence gives us a new vision of all things.” We cannot forget that the goal is not to live in a never-ending retreat, but to let this annual pause give the Holy Spirit room to fill our lives with light so that we may live as beloved children of God in our work, our families, and our ordinary duties.

“It is essential to set aside times of silence, moments of prayer, times when, quieting noise and distractions, we place ourselves before Him and find unity within ourselves” (Pope Leo XIV, 20 July 2025).

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