

My First Opus Dei Retreat Experience!

Ambrose describes his experience in attending a retreat at the Irawo University Centre in Ibadan.

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Interestingly, I have had series of retreats in the past but, none has been as intense and rich as the just concluded retreat I participated at the Irawo University Centre in Ibadan. Thus, the feeling of nostalgia as I write about my experience, wearing a great smile with a heart

full of fulfilment. This is my first one since I joined Opus Dei as a supernumerary member.

I had been consciously and unconsciously looking forward to participating in a retreat since May. Sadly, I missed several opportunities due to some reasons. On two different occasions, when I came around Irawo for means of formation I would see both familiar and unfamiliar members of the Work moving from one spot to the other as activities changed during their retreat. And so, I could only ponder, with deep pain in my heart, on the seriousness of what I was missing. While I kept hope alive, with a constant struggle in improving my interior life, an opportunity came and this, I embraced joyfully. My attention was called to a retreat scheduled from 4th to 7th November, 2022; my wonderful friends did not only remind me of the importance of

a retreat but they also made it possible that I participate in this spiritual exercise of renewal and self-knowledge.

The day of the retreat came with mixed feelings both for me and my family. **While my wife and daughter lamented the unavailability of a husband and father for the coming days, I was anxiously looking forward to having a remarkable experience.** Straight from a departmental meeting at the *Saints Peter and Paul Major Seminary* in Ibadan -where I work as a supporting staff, tutoring third year Philosophy students in a general studies course- I made my way to Irawo. However, the thought of the vacuum my absence will cause at home for these few days had its own psychological impact on me and would come to affect my mood on the first day.

During the days of the retreat, everyone is assigned a material assignment for the proper functioning of the activity. The task assigned to me on the evening of the first day by the director of Irawo was to care for one of the oldest supernumeraries in Ibadan, Kola, who was attending the retreat, as he had always done, at the age of 87. He had come from about 60 kilometers away. This assignment did not only help to snap me out of my dour mood; it gave me something supernatural to reflect upon, like how short our youth is and the beauty of the struggle for sanctity and journey of life I have come to embrace as a supernumerary.

The retreat started and ended in a very calm and peaceful atmosphere. Days went by unnoticed; activities were perfectly organized such that everyone knew what to do and where to be at every given time. In

fellow retreaters, I saw young minds with a burning desire for purity and sanctity. Retreat talks focused on the spiritual norms of piety and customs of the Work and accommodated a special discourse on courtship and the sacrament of matrimony. Meditations helped us to reflect deeply on the purpose of our existence as they focused on life, death, and life after death. My personal interaction with the priest helped me address holistically the complexity of man's thought, as well as how, and the need to keep the mind pure at all times. In simple terms, I would say the retreat was super exciting.

Also rewarding was the achievement of a personal goal, to read a spiritual book. While I prepared for the retreat, I assured myself that I must read a book – One book always in my mind was “Conversation with Christ” because it would help me improve

my mental prayer, and this I achieved. Though yet to finish as at Sunday morning, I woke up with, what I thought was a beautiful summary of the book in my mind – *Mental prayer requires a great deal of love.* It demands courage, determination, and patience for sustenance and satisfaction. The summary may not be perfect, but, for me, it was all I needed. Indeed, I had a remarkable experience during the three days of retreat.

On stepping out of the premises of Irawo on Monday morning I noticed the world I left a few days back remained the same; I thought it should have changed. **It was me feeling different.** I could feel in every sense that I was renewed, refreshed, and refilled to cope better with life and family. On reuniting with my family in the evening, it was all smiles. Little Olivia -my daughter- full of excitement, gave me a super

hug as she exclaimed, “**My mummy... see my daddy.**” And my wife kept blinking her eyes wearing a very big smile. **I was grateful to God for keeping them as I prayed for them all through the retreat with a resolution to make them happier than I left them.** This is the joy of family. I am confident to say I just had the best retreat of my life. Prayer is life, I look forward to next year’s retreat. Blessed be God forever!

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