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What is a Spiritual Retreat?

A spiritual retreat is an important break, a few days spent in prayer alone with God. It is the spiritual equivalent of an annual car inspection or medical check-up: time in the presence of God, examining our Christian lives to try to see where we're at and how we can to improve our relationships with God and others.

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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, February 25, 1963).

Retreats organized by centers of the Work normally take place over a long weekend, in a conference center away from the noise of the city. It is highly recommended, during these days, to *fast* from internet, social media and instant messaging so as to attain the calm and serenity necessary for intimate dialogue with God.

Almost all of the activities are organized around the Eucharist, taking place in the chapel or oratory of the conference center: daily Mass, the Way of the Cross, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, examinations of conscience, and the guided prayer sessions or meditations in which the priest prays out loud about a theme related to 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 includes some talks, 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? Nothing more... and nothing less. The priest tries to prepare the meditations well in order to present the life of Jesus Christ in an attractive way. Some may stress the importance of taking notes, of accompanying the general schedule with the reading of a spiritual book, of making resolutions... But all that is up to the personal style 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" — and not to forget that the goal is not to live in a never-ending retreat. Rather, this annual pause allows the Holy Spirit to fill all the corners of our ordinary lives, professional work, family, and ordinary duties, with light.

"In the midst of all our activities, we often neglect the essential: the spiritual life, our relationship with God. Let us pause to pray!" (Pope Francis, Tweet, March 9, 2018).

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