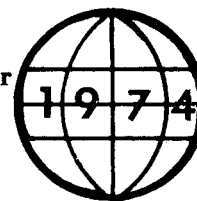


Contemporary Issues:

by Richard J. Foster



To Retreat or Not To Retreat

AS I WRITE TO YOU, I have just returned from three days of private study and prayer at a Franciscan Retreat Center on the Pacific Coast. What a good time of growth and spiritual power it was! Now I know many believe such activity to be a genuine waste — if not by their words at least in their deeds. These are abbreviated men and women. They do not know from whence comes the real power for service. If you want to see lives substantially changed for God, you need the power. I do not know about you, but I cannot get the power without being much alone with God.

Group Retreats

But are not family camps and other group retreats enough? If they are for you, fine; they are not enough for me. If they give you the power to live a life of holiness to successfully attack evil in all its personal and institutional forms, to heal the sick and give sight to the blind, to see lives around you everywhere changed, then good. I confess that while daily devotional experiences and family camps are often good experiences for me, they are not sufficient. And I imagine that there are others who in honest moments would admit that for all their churchy activities they lack apostolic power. So let me suggest that you periodically get *alone* for a few days and discover the knowledge of the Holy. It is producing the results in me; I believe it can for you.

When: "How often should a person go on private retreat?" There is no hard rule in this matter. I suggest twice a year — in December and in June. For many people weekends are a good time to go. Most churches will not only free you from responsibility but will pray seriously for your experiment.

Where: "Can I just stay at home?" Good for you if you can. I cannot. The phone, jobs to do, people popping in, a quick run to the store, all defeat me. I must go away.

A place to go can be a real problem if you go on a weekend. I have checked with nearly every retreat center in Southern California (and there are plenty of them) and not one has facilities

for private retreats. A sad commentary on our times, I think. Often a Roman Catholic monastery will have wonderful facilities for this and would welcome you. A mountain cabin, beach house or quiet motel will also serve quite adequately.

What: "But what should I do?" That depends. What is the most acute need in your life? To rest, to think, to study, to pray, to make a crucial decision. Three days spent learning how you can pray with greater effectiveness and power would be a valuable use of time. Reading large portions of Scripture in a short time can be most illuminating. Perhaps your need will be to experience the inversion of a popular cliché so it will read: "Don't just do something, stand there!"

Why: "But why should I use my valuable time in this way?" Why not? You use your time for everything else under the sun, why not use it to learn about the Eternal Heart of the Universe. We must face squarely the fact that the world has convinced us that we can get along quite well without such experiences, thank you. After all there are so many important things in the "real" world that must get done. And so our acculturation is complete. It never dawns on us that the knowledge of God is the only "real" world that exists. Until you get this matter straight, you will simply not consider private retreats, since "no reasonable person would spend so much time engaged in something so trivial."

But for those who have eyes to see, let them see. . . .and discover! q