



Teams of Our Lady

THE RETREAT

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INTRODUCTION

The annual retreat is one of the six endeavours to which each member of the Teams of Our Lady makes a commitment. **It is an innovation of Fr Caffarel's; he encourages us to make the retreat as a couple.**

The retreat allows us **to answer the Lord's call to stop and take some time apart** to become aware of what is essential: **to meet** the One who loves us and calls us, **Christ the Lord**. It is also a time to find ourselves again and to refocus on being a couple.

Christ Himself frequently withdrew to the desert and **advised his disciples also to take some time apart**. He invites us to spend some time before God, to reflect on our personal and conjugal life and to plan for the future.

We need rest and food to be in good health, we also need **rest** and **food** to strengthen our spiritual life.

The retreat requires an **openness** and a detachment from whatever is preoccupying our minds or paralysing our hearts

I. Where does the idea of a retreat come from?

1 – The bible

Practical idea: these texts can help us to pray

A - The Old Testament

In Genesis, God sets an example: *“On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing. He rested on the seventh day after all the work he had been doing.”* (Gen 2, 2)

In Exodus, God led his people Israel on a retreat lasting 40 years in the desert in order to become his chosen people: “Moses then went up to God, and Yahweh called to him from the mountain, saying, Say this to the House of Jacob! Tell the Israelites, ‘You have seen for yourselves what I did with the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself. So now, if you obey my voice and hold fast to my covenant, you of all the nations shall be my very own for all the earth is mine.” (Ex 19, 3-5)

“He stayed there with Yahweh for forty days and forty nights, eating and drinking nothing. He inscribed on the tablets the words of the Covenant -- the Ten Words.” (Ex 34, 28)

In Deuteronomy, it says: *“Remember how Yahweh your God led you for forty*

years in the wilderness, to humble you, to test you and know your inmost heart -- whether you would keep his commandments or not?” (Dt 8, 2)



For 40 years the Lord watched over his people with great mercy:

“He revealed his intentions to Moses, his prowess to the children of Israel. Yahweh is tender and compassionate, slow to anger, most loving;” (Ps 103)

“That is why I am going to lure her and lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart. I am going to give her back her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a gateway of hope.” (Hos 2, 16-17)

B - The New Testament

After the death of John the Baptist Jesus teaches us the necessity of withdrawing: *“When Jesus received this news he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves.”* (Mt 14, 13)



He also calls his disciples apart to reveal Himself to them: *“Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus.”* (Mk 9, 2-4)

“Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.” (Mt 11, 28)

Jesus calls us in order to take care of us: *“You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while.”* (Mk 6, 31)

This time of retreat allows for intimacy, a heart to heart with the Lord: *“But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.”* (Mt 6, 6)

3 – Father Caffarel

Father Caffarel was innovative in this endeavour, but he encountered a lot of difficulties. In 1939 he wanted to organise the first retreat for couples but male mon-

asteries would only receive male guests; and female monasteries would only receive female guests.

He used to say:

“from time to time our faith weakens. Only the breath of the Word of God can reawaken it, strengthen it, give it life again. During the retreat we can open ourselves to the breath of God’s word.”

(monthly letter to Teams of Our Lady, 13th year, number 5, February 1960)

Father Caffarel was always encouraging couples to go on retreat. He said:

“We devote too much time to ourselves and so little to Christ.”

“Our chief sin is not being hungry enough for Him. Let us be eager to spend time with Him!”

(Retreat at the Cenacle, February 1944)

During this retreat at the Cenacle, he also said: "Our souls can often be obscured by a haze. A retreat can have a deep impact on our life. It can clear this haze."

In his speech at Chantilly he recalled the first retreat in 1939: "For 3 days I spoke about the dignity of the couple's vocation and their mission in the Church. There were about 15 couples. The retreat is not an escape from real life."

(L'Anneau d'Or, n° 14, 1947).



*The **Charter of the Teams** (1947, updated in 1977) says: couples are invited to "Present themselves **each year** before the Lord for a 48 hours retreat, wherever possible as a **couple**."*

In 1962 he warned us against the easy way out which is always of less benefit:

"Retreats for couples have developed over the last 30 years in many countries. They seem to be one of the most beneficial initiatives in helping couples to live their Christian lives. But it is still necessary to guard against cheap solutions."

(L'Anneau d'Or, N° 105-106).

Here is what the Guide to the Teams of Our Lady (2001) says about the retreat: "Team members are encouraged to make sufficient time each year for a retreat, as couples if possible, so that they can reflect on life in the presence of the Lord"

4 – Saints, popes and priests



Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) proposed a particular type of retreat called "The Spiritual Exercises". It is about working intensely over several days in order to overcome our self-centredness, and to direct our hearts towards God. This type of retreat is usually individual but a couple, or even a team can participate.



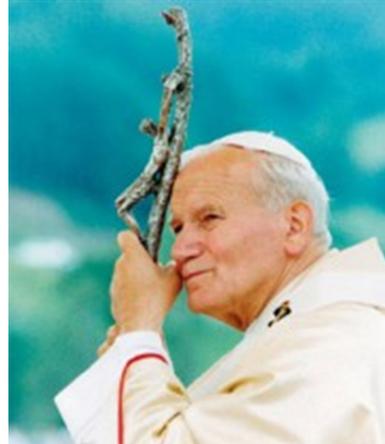
Father René Voillaume (1905-2003), founder of the congregation of the Little Brothers of Jesus and the Little Sisters of the Gospel wrote: “You must go to the desert with a simple soul, without worrying about doing something: in reality you do not have anything to do in the desert, but to simplify your life, to strip yourself of all concerns and activities. The desert is not easy, it is demanding.”



Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997) speaks about silence and Jesus waiting for us: “I always start praying in silence: God speaks to us in the silence of our heart. God is the friend of silence and we have to listen to Him. What matters is not what we say but what He says to us and what He can say through us.”

“Jesus wants me to tell you how great his love is for each one of you. Greater

than all you can imagine. It’s not just that He loves you, He ardently desires you. He misses you if you do not come to Him. He is thirsty for you.”



Saint John Paul II urges us: “Do not be afraid to give up your time for Christ.” “Time has a spiritual dimension, which we must inhabit, and not simply control.” (Apostolical letter *Dies Domini* 1998, No 84)



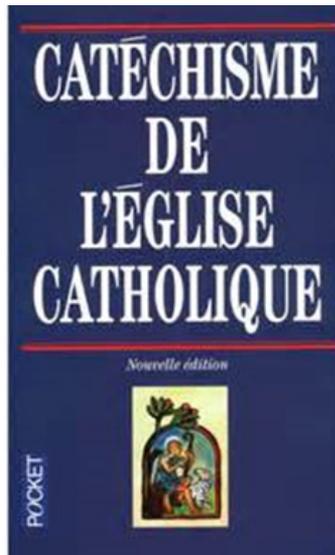
Pope Francis urges us to retreat: “Men and women of our time need to meet God, and really get to know Him personally, not just by hearing about Him... A good spiritual retreat enables us to renew our unconditional love for Christ and helps us to understand that prayer is the irreplaceable means of union with the Crucified Lord.”

5 – The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (n°2560) quotes Saint Augustine:

“Christ comes to meet every human being.
It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us.

(...)God thirsts that we may thirst for him.”



II. Why do we go on retreat?

1 - To answer the Lord's call

In order to **answer with faith the invitation of Jesus**, who is waiting for me and inviting me to follow Him. No director, no programme, no theme of any retreat can be more important than this invitation.

In order to **discover that desert place** which facilitates the soul's union with God. The search for the desert is a constant feature in the history of spirituality.

In order to **find inner silence** which allows us to embrace the presence of God.

In order to **develop** (or restore) within ourselves the **heart of a child who listens**.

In order to **have the opportunity to deepen our prayer**. This can be a source of strength and light for the rest of the year.



In order to renew our spiritual life by developing our intimacy with the Lord.

In order to receive the Lord's forgiveness through the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**.

To give the Lord first place in our lives.

2 - To reflect on ourselves

In order to **discover how to fulfil the will of God in our lives**.

In order to discern how to fulfil our mission to spread God's love around us.

In order to **take our lives in hand**: the retreat is not an escape or a denial of reality, but an occasion for a serious assessment of our situation in life and for planning our future.

In order to **review our Rule(s) of Life**.



in which we are constantly chasing time.

Because **the retreat is one of our endeavours.**

TESTIMONY OF A PRIEST: *“My understanding of what a retreat is has changed over time. When I was younger, I went to a retreat with the firm desire of coming to terms with the questions I had. Back then the retreat was a time of reflection, of introspection and of decisions. It had to end up with some “resolutions”. Today, the most important dimension of the retreat is the complete opposite: it is pure gift. I am not going on retreat for any other reason than to have a heart to heart dialogue with the Lord. Certainly there are some “fruits” from the retreat, especially the graces of peace and inner joy, but I am not looking for the retreat to produce these effects. In simple terms I would say that the retreat is no longer an effort but a comfort!”*

III. How to make a retreat?

1 – Getting ready

For a retreat to be fruitful it has to **be desired**. And this desire is a fruit of prayer: *“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find”* (Mt 7, 7)

The organisation of the retreat needs to take into account the time available, the financial means of the couple and whether or not they can organise child-minding for their children.

To make good use of the many retreat ideas available from the Movement or from other Christian organisations

We do not attend a retreat just because it is our duty or because we are committed to a programme, nor as tourists, nor to escape reality but **freely choosing to seek the truth**.

2 - With whom?

We are invited to a retreat **where possible as a couple**, according to the Charter.

We can go as a couple alone or with our Team, or as part of a larger group:

eg. a Sector retreat or one arranged by another organisation

Exceptionally, we may make a retreat alone, but united in prayer with our spouse.

3 – When to go?

Going on a retreat is a **special event** which requires a conscious decision.

The commitment we have in Teams is to do **one annual retreat**, but each couple grows at **their own pace** so it may be even more frequent.

One honeymoon is not enough to sustain our whole married life, in the

same way, one retreat cannot guarantee lifelong renewal.



4 - What type of retreat?

A – A silent retreat

The point of a retreat is to withdraw from daily life, and **silence** is at **its core**.

We speak a lot to God and it is a good thing, **but let us allow him to speak in our hearts** of his mercy, his tenderness and his love.

In silence **God offers us**

- His Way on which He wants to accompany us,

- His Truth when we are facing the challenges of our world,

- His Life.

TESTIMONY of a couple: *“Without doubt we would choose a silent retreat. Not only is the Lord present in silence, but the silence helps us to listen to Him. If there are a lot of people at the retreat the silence enables personal reflection for each participant. Silence does not exclude dialogue between the couple.”*

B – Other types of retreat

There is a place for different activities in a retreat

Instruction: This needs a well-chosen theme and a good speaker.

A time for **sharing** with the group.

A time for **prayer** and praise together and participation in the Divine Office.

Spiritual counselling as an individual or a couple: sometimes we need to deal with personal issues. It can help to talk to a priest individually or as a couple.

An opportunity for a **sit down**: it can be short or long, providing it doesn't jeopardise the retreat.

A **special time with our team**, or our sector/region if the retreat is shared with them.

Some **meditation** time, to reflect on what God is revealing in our life,

Some **adoration** time,

And **always some silence** set aside for personal prayer and examination of conscience.

TESTIMONY: *“It was a difficult period of our life and we decided to do a retreat instead of a holiday trip. We were afraid of 5 days of silence but we had a programme and were encouraged to read and meditate on the Word of God between the talks and prayer times. On the first day these times of silence felt very long, but soon enough they brought us peace and openness to the Word of God and to meditation. We were also very touched by the teaching on prayer.*

We had the opportunity of meeting a spiritual counsellor at the retreat to share our difficulties. He advised us to replace one day of silence with a full day of a sit down, which seemed to us too short! He guided us in our choice of our rules of life which would help us to move forward together.

We also received the sacrament of reconciliation.

We came back home with a new-found peace and the desire to re-build our relationship. At first we had been afraid of the silence, but at the end of the 5 days we were amazed at what silence had done for our relationship with the Lord and with each other.

Long after the retreat was finished its effects continued to transform us little by little. We give thanks for having had this very special couple time.”

To **fast** is to detach ourselves a little from material things; this can help us to pray. Fasting sustains the prayer and the prayer gives meaning to the

fasting: Before God I am like an infant receiving its nourishment from Him, He alone is the source of my life.

5 - Organisation

***Choose a place** that suits the team, preferably with a priest.

and consider the need for childminding as appropriate.

***Choose a community** whose liturgy meets our spiritual needs.

***Choose to go as a team**, the team spiritual counsellor could give the talks.

***Choose a retreat leader:** a retreat could be led by a trained couple helping the priest.

***Choose the duration:** 48 hours (2 nights) are strongly recommended by the Charter.

***Choose a date:** well in advance

TESTIMONY: *“For a very long time our retreats were from the Saturday morning to the Sunday afternoon, that is to say little more than 24hours. One day, during a talk to responsible couples we heard of the call from Father Caffarel to have a 48hours retreat. We decided to obey and make an effort to leave on the Friday evening. Our retreat was transformed: we were really “withdrawing” from the world, we had the time to be more open to the graces awaiting us. Since then we make this commitment every year and it has changed everything. Experience it yourselves!”*

6 – To have the right attitude

To respond individually and as a couple to God, who is inviting us.

To come **without any preconceived ideas**

To listen to the Holy Spirit.

(not making resolutions in advance)

To welcome the Word Of God: to clear our minds of the worries that preoccupy us, of our plans, of our to-do list, of our loved ones, of our doubts, of our disappointments...

To talk to God, to ask for His grace, and above all to listen to Him.



TESTIMONY OF AN AFRICAN COUPLE: *“Our couples do not have great financial means so every year we organise our retreats in the suburb of the capital. We stay in religious communities where some of our team members work.*

We bring our own sleeping mats, our pots and pans and everything we need to make simple meals.

We stay there with open hearts, our minds free to pray and reflect deeply on the challenges which our spiritual counsellor offers us.

All the rest is put aside: our problems, our difficulties, our disagreements, our misunderstandings. Only God counts and we dedicate all our time to Him.

At the end of the retreat we look at each other in a new light. It seems to us that life is brighter and each of our couples has been blessed.

Before leaving we share a last meal. We are all glowing with joy, enthusiasm, and love which reflects the presence of Jesus among us.”

7 – The Importance of the sacraments

The **sacrament of reconciliation** can be requested during the retreat. It is preceded by an examination of conscience: reviewing our past life, our relationship with God and with our neighbour.



Receiving God's forgiveness will deepen our experience of the retreat.



Participating in the daily **Eucharist** is an essential part of the retreat.

8 – End of the retreat

Make some **practical resolutions** for the coming year

*"...and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me."
(Ga 2, 20)*

IV. Difficulties of the retreat

1 - Before the retreat

Finding the time to make the retreat. It requires effort, personal organisation and the need to **prioritise**.

Organising childminding. Our family, our team, or other Team members may be able to **help**. Sometimes **retreat centres welcome children**.

Financial obstacles. We can ask our team or the community welcoming us to **help** if possible: those in difficulty give what they can, others will give a little

more to compensate. Some teams **save money** all through the year.

Thinking “it’s not for me, it’s only for holy people.” This can be a big obstacle. Let us not forget **the grace of God**.

Being afraid of God: “What will God ask of me during the retreat? Is He going to turn my life upside down?” It’s **the risk we run meeting the Lord!** We have to **take this risk** to discover that He wants to save us.

TESTIMONY FROM A COUPLE FROM AMAZONIA: *“It took 2 days in a dugout canoe to reach the location of the retreat, but no obstacle would have stopped us! It was with great enthusiasm that we prepared ourselves for these meetings with the Lord and with other couples!...*

During the course of our journey we never stopped singing hymns of praise and gratitude to the Lord and to Teams for the beautiful moments of reflection and prayer in the presence of Jesus.

After the retreat we came back home full of joy and energy, full of hope to face the difficulties of life.”

2 - During the retreat

Not being willing to open ourselves to God.

Being distracted or on edge if the location, the speaker, the organisation,... doesn't suit us:

Concentrate on the essential, don't linger over details.

3 - After the retreat

Careful! It is **after the retreat** that we have to watch out: we feel very strong and protected from temptation. Let us be on our guard, **the Devil is going to redouble his efforts! ... but grace is at hand.**

The positive effects do not last for ever. We have to persevere and entrust our efforts to the Lord

V. The fruits of the retreat

1 - Personal fruits

Revitalizing our spiritual life, **giving God first place.**

Discovering how **to do His will** in our lives.

Discovering with God **our vocation and our mission**, in order to show his love and joy to others.

Witnessing to our faith through our words and deeds.

Being faithful to daily prayer.

Continuing the conversion begun during the retreat: trusting the Lord more, being more loving to our neighbour, being more discerning about our commitments.



2 - Fruits for the couple

A spiritual retreat made as a couple is an experience which can transform our conjugal life.

Discovering the will of God for us as a couple.

The benefits of the retreat come from the two meetings, which in reality are only one: **the meeting with each other and the meeting together with God.** The success of our conjugal life depends on the quality of these meetings.

Praying and being together on retreat is **to be touched by God**, who offers Himself to us.

It is **resting and renewing ourselves** together to be ready for the challenges of life.

Finally the retreat **renews our spiritual growth and the richness of the sacrament of our marriage.**



3 - Fruits for the team

Sharing our retreat experience as a couple, with our team, benefits them. It can be a positive stimulation for their progress as team members and can encourage them to make a retreat too.

The benefits of a retreat as a team are real: the members grow closer together and the spiritual life of the whole team is enriched.

TESTIMONY: *“Our team retreat is the climax of the year. We spend a few days together, usually in a monastery. It is a time when we grow in knowledge and love each other! Prayer, talks, meals, breaks, services... are all occasions for experiencing ourselves as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is always a great joy to make a retreat with our team, because it brings us closer to God and closer to each other... We are looking forward to the next retreat!”*



TESTIMONY: *“Our team retreats are always wonderful. It is a time of joy, of sharing, of fellowship, of discovery. It is a precious time for our team, and also for us as a couple. The community welcoming us sets the tone for these three days. The responsible couple brings their own personal touch, so the retreat is different every year. We would not miss it, for the world!”*

CONCLUSION

The retreat is to the year what prayer is to the day: a time to withdraw from our daily lives which enables a heart to heart dialogue with the Lord.

Different types of retreat are possible, but a time of **silent intimacy** with the Lord is essential.

The retreat allows us **to revitalize** our personal spiritual life and our conjugal spiritual life, to make **God first again in our lives**. The retreat enriches the sacrament of our marriage and brings us back to the source of our love. It encourages us on our path to holiness.

The retreat is **a faith-response to God who invites us** to meet Christ and to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

KEY WORDS



God's call, Silence, Listening,
Prayer, Place, Preparation,
Meditation, Intimacy,
Availability, Instruction,
Conversion.