

Closing Remarks After Retreat

Guys (or Ladies),

Thanks for coming to the retreat. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm TIRED. Deep introspection about life and God has a tendency to do that to you. But it's a GOOD tired ...

As I've told many of you, my first Retreat in **(Year)** was a revelation for me. I was given a gift - and that gift was a glimpse into what it means to be a true follower of Christ. I'm embarrassed to say that after 45 years in the Catholic Church, I had no clue. I thought that prayer was about asking God for stuff. I didn't know that it is a two-way conversation with an emphasis on listening to Him. I thought that God was an angry and judgmental God, especially when it came to my not infrequent transgressions. I didn't know that he loves me unconditionally, and that he desperately wants a relationship with me that goes beyond one hour every week in church. I thought that people who talked about God and prayer and Jesus and The Cross and other "Christian stuff" were well-meaning but pious goody-goodies, best avoided whenever possible. I didn't know that they had actually found the secret to peace and happiness, and that I was the clueless one.

I learned all of those things on my first retreat, and I was very concerned that I would quickly forget them if I went home from the retreat and fell back into the same business-as-usual life that I had been living. So I did several things that I found valuable to keep me on the path, and I've done them pretty consistently over the years. I offer them as suggestions with apology to those of you who may be further down the path in your spiritual life than I am, and are already doing all of these things. ;

Here they are:

1. Try to pray every day. Doesn't matter if it's just five minutes or fifty, prayer is the primary way that you will hear God telling you what his will is for your life, and is the primary channel God uses to shape your heart, mind, and soul. You cannot get around it. Every priest, every mystic, every devout Christian will tell you this. I ignored it for too long but am grateful that I finally figured out that they were right. While you need to be patient in your prayer, if you keep at it God will respond to you. To avoid dying of boredom while you pray, mix it up. Use the multiple methods of prayer that are extensively outlined in Christian books and Web sites. One good one is: <http://www.upperroom.org/methodx/thelife/prayermethods/>
2. Learn from others by reading. The list of great spiritual books is endless, but some of my recent favorites are Tender Warrior, by Stu Weber; As a Man Thinketh by James Allen; The Case for Faith by Lee Strobel; What Jesus Meant by Gary Wills; Father Joe by Tony Hendra; The Seven Story Mountain, by Thomas Merton; Enjoy Your Precious Life by John Catoir, SJ; and anything written by Anthony de Mello.
3. Journal. Go to Wal-Mart and get a good quality faux leather journal. Put "PRIVATE" in big letter on the front, and use it to capture the thoughts, revelations, questions, and everything else that comes to you in your spiritual quest. Writing it in your journal helps to do several things. First, you capture thoughts and feelings for future reference that will otherwise slip away, never to return. Second, forcing yourself to capture your thoughts in writing takes them from the ethereal to the tangible. Third, you will be able to look back and see the progress you are making, which can be very comforting in the inevitable times of discouragement and upheaval.
4. Get an occasional fill-up at Loyola. This was mentioned on Friday night, but the Loyola House of Retreats is a special place. People who have been on several retreats will tell you that they feel an immediate sense of peace and spiritual connection when they walk through those doors. You are welcome at any time to just go there, sit in the library and read, visit the bookstore, walk around the grounds. The doors are always open during the day, 7 days a week. You can also go to "First Fridays," which takes place the first Friday of every "month from 7am to 8AM. I'm usually there along with 40-50 other men and women. It starts with a 10-15 minute talk from one of the Jesuits, followed by 10-15 minutes of quiet contemplation, followed by a half hour Eucharistic service. You can stay afterwards and have breakfast, but I usually bolt. You can also go to daily mass there in the second floor chapel. It starts at 11:30 and is usually done by 12:00.

So anyway, those are my suggestions for things you can do to keep the momentum going.

Finally, I want to share a great piece with you that I discovered during a retreat. It's by a Jesuit named Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and is meant for those Type A's among us who are overly judgmental, critical, and impatient with ourselves. It's called "Patient Trust in Ourselves and in the Slow Work of God."

Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are, quite naturally,

impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip

the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being

on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress

that it is made by passing through some stages of instability-

and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you. Your ideas mature gradually, let them grow,

let them shape themselves, without due haste.

Don't try to force them on,

as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting

on your own good will)

will make you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.

Give our Lord the benefit of believing

that his hand is leading you,

and accept the anxiety of

feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

+Peace,

(Your Name)