

WHY GO ON RETREAT?

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Why do we go on retreat? Is it a time to get away from family, traffic, work or some other “problem”? Why do we go? We should go simply to meet with God. This is why we go out into the “wilderness”, why we go on retreat. We follow the tradition of our ancestors – who went into the desert to renew themselves and meet God.

We retreat for time of solitude and silence, to be apart from the world and close to God. Oftentimes, we will meet our adversary, too – the one who would like to stand in the way of God’s intentions. And, oftentimes, we will meet our true self. We retreat to place ourselves in a position to receive what God gives. It is an intentional “setting ourselves apart” to listen, to have no agenda of our own, to simply be open to God. It is being vulnerable to God, disallowing distraction and allowing God time to work in a significant way in our hearts.

On retreat, we do not have to pay attention to others. We do not have to make small talk. We do not have to be something for somebody else. We go there to be open to God. Even if we have no idea what God wants to do, or why, even if we do not think God really needs to do any major work – we can still retreat. We do not have to go because we have some crisis which needs fixing. We go because we want to know God, to say, “Here I am, God, do what you want.” I believe God takes a life and does something just because we present ourselves.

Sadhu Sundar Singh, the great Indian Christian mystic says something so wonderful about why we go on retreat, why we go away to be with God in an intentional way, why we go to dwell in the wilderness, why we go dwell on the mountaintop:

“On the mountains, torrents flow right along cutting their own courses, but on the plains, canals have to be dug out painfully by men so that the water might flow. So among those who live on the heights with God, the Holy Spirit makes His way through of its own accord, whereas those who devote little time to prayer and communion with God have to organize painfully.”

What a wonderful quote! We need to spend time dwelling on the heights. It is okay to say it! I can say, “I want to be on the heights with God! I want to be there! I want to be a Sadhu Sundar Singh! I want to be like him! Paul says “imitate me as I imitate Christ.” We can say, “I want to imitate Paul. I want to imitate David. I want to imitate Deborah. I want to imitate Teresa of Avila. I want to place myself in a position where God can work in me. I do not want to leave any stone unturned in becoming the person God created me to be.”