

“How to Make a Good Retreat”

by Father John Catoir JCD - 7/26/18

In order to make a helpful retreat, you must plan ahead. Ask yourself what you hope to take away from the experience? Here's how I go about it. At the opening of every retreat I conduct I ask the retreatants, “What are you hoping to get from this weekend?”

Here is a sampling of the answers they give me: “I came to recharge my batteries; to be more comfortable with myself; to get better at talking to God; to be more hopeful, and less negative; to hear God's voice telling me whether I'm still on the right track”; the list goes on and on.

Then I explain the theme of the retreat I have prepared for them. I want our time together to be fruitful, so I challenge them right away. “God is calling you higher. He wants you to live more joyfully because of the knowledge of his love.” This theme is taken from the words of Blessed Julian of Norwich, a 15th century, English mystic who is revered for her joyful spirit. If you put this desire into practice miracles will happen. Joy and self-respect will flow into your veins. The body and spirit are one. That means you are able to make your dreams come true.

Begin to practice living joyfully right away. It's a matter of skill development. You don't have to do anything to win God's love, but you do have to practice the virtues. Virtues turn into habits and good habits shape character. Think about it. Since fear and anger are the chief enemies of joy, you must strive to banish fear and anger from your psyche. Concentrate on joy. Lift up your heart more often and actually feel the joy of being alive. You are loved by God. That's a fantastic fact of life.

Now let's get specific. Suppose you want to get a better handle on your drinking. The founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson and Bob Richards, recommend that you practice the “Third Step” of the “Twelve Step Program.” This tells you to “turn your life and your will over to the God of your understanding.” If you do that repeatedly, it will become a habit. A.A. makes the claim that if you truly turn everything over to Him, most especially your weakness, then God will do for you what you have not yet been able to do for yourself. He will take the craving for alcohol away. It's a fact. Millions of recovering addicts testify to this fact.

Some alcoholics think that sobriety is the goal of recovery. Not so! Living Joyfully is the goal. Liberation from guilt, anger and negativity are the real goals. Some drinkers manage to stay away from booze, but they remain angry and bitter, and continue to be miserable. I remind them of the beautiful words of Blessed Julian of Norwich, “The greatest honor you can give to Almighty God is to live joyfully because of the knowledge of God's love.” It is a goal worth pursuing, so make it your primary goal.

For more on the topic of joy, check out my websites: JohnCatoir.com messengerofjoy.com or find me on Twitter: @johncatoir.