

PASTOR'S CORNER

Why make a retreat?



I made a 5-day silent retreat recently at the Abbey in Covington (*photo above*). I had a room in the monastery. I prayed and ate with the monks. Why does the Church require priests to make an annual retreat? Why is retreat week my favorite week of the year?

Spiritual Reboot. A retreat provides the opportunity for a spiritual reboot with God. On a typical day, I pray for an hour-plus but my prayer is often bombarded by thoughts of work. On retreat, I have no ministry responsibilities, so I can pray for hours and focus on renewing my friendship with Jesus – rather than on work. That is the greatest blessing of a retreat.

Rest. I have a heavy schedule in the parish, rising early and retiring late each day. I don't get a huge amount of sleep at night and there is no time for afternoon naps. But on retreat, with no cell phone, Internet, email, texts or T.V., I can go to bed early and nap when the mood strikes me. My body and soul get recharged through rest.

Nature. I select retreat houses in the mountains, the woods or by lakes. I relish the beauty of nature. Taking nature walks lifts my mind, heart and spirit to God.

Reading. As a priest, I constantly am reading about spiritual things, church things and current events, but on retreat – uninterrupted by noise and work – I read solely for spiritual enrichment – and it is wonderful.

Listening. I try to listen to God every time I pray, read or interact with people, but on retreat, I hear and see God in everything: nature, food, rest, exercise, reading, and prayer. God is palpably present and usually has a special message for me – an insight, a consolation, a challenge, something to take with me as I return to the life of ministry.

Now you know why retreat week is my favorite week of the year, and why I encourage everyone to make an annual spiritual retreat.

God bless you,
Fr. Joe