



## *Thoughts on the Journey...*

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My first real retreat was in 1972 - my junior year in high school. My friend Pam and I heard about the retreat through other friends and thought it would be fun

because it was open to junior and senior females AND males. Truth be known, if boys weren't part of the event, we probably wouldn't have given it a second thought. A weekend retreat with guys when we both attended all-girl Catholic high schools?! Of course we were going!

It was called TEC which stood for Teens Encounter Christ. When we were filling out our registration forms and turning in our money, neither one of us boy-crazy girls were thinking about an encounter with Christ. Instead, we were quite excited about the possibility of an encounter of a different kind. If it was an opportunity to meet some new boys we were willing to suffer through a retreat to accomplish that objective. Our conversations for the three weeks leading up to the retreat centered around hair, clothes, make-up, and teenage what-if scenarios that heightened our excitement.

It was time for the TEC retreat. We arrived at the mansion on the Crosley Estate in Cincinnati at 6:30 p.m. with suitcases and sleeping bags in hand. There was the usual hustle and bustle as young people scrambled to check in and receive their instructions. Almost immediately, I noticed a young man in a brown Franciscan habit complete with a rope around his waist and a pair of sandals on his feet. He greeted us warmly as we entered and introduced himself as Father Richard. I particularly remember his eye contact with each person and the warmth of his embrace that made me feel like I was his best friend. After we settled our things, we all gathered for praise and worship followed by an evening social. Fires were burning in the big stone fireplaces throughout the house which made the walls glow with an inviting aura. For some reason, it felt so good to be with these people I didn't know and I began to feel a shift in my focus for being at this retreat.

In the morning, after we were served a delicious breakfast by the retreat team, we had our first morning conference. Fr. Richard Rohr, the retreat facilitator, stood in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows. Sunlight poured into the room around this priest, who seemed like a pied piper of souls, and he began to lead my heart directly to Jesus. Every thought that came from his mouth to my ears brought me a little closer to Christ and before long I realized that I cared less about the boys in the room and more about the God he was leading me to see.

In Matthew's gospel, after the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus left Nazareth and went to Capernaum to fulfill a prophecy of Isaiah. Walking along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus had an encounter with two brothers, Simon (Peter) and Andrew. Jesus said to them,

**“Come after me and I will make you fishers of men.”**

They left their fishing nets immediately and followed him. Walking along further, Jesus met with two other brothers, James and John. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

It's interesting to ponder the countless possibilities of how, when, and under what circumstances people have been led to Christ over the ages. Our gospel tells of four brothers whose encounter with Jesus led to an awe-inspiring immediate acceptance of Jesus' call. It was a turning point in their lives that changed everything. I'm sure they didn't fully realize what they were saying 'yes' to, but Jesus gradually revealed who he was in the events, miracles, teachings, and day-to-day example of life he shared with them. Eventually, the apostles led thousands to Jesus. Scripture and history is filled with the many legends and stories of ordinary people who have been led to Christ by other ordinary people. Lives were changed in an extraordinary way, not by the people themselves who led them, but by the Jesus they encountered through the workings of the Holy Spirit.

Each one of us has a story to tell. We're all part of the continuum of salvation history. Sometimes we are caught off guard or perhaps blindsided by an encounter we didn't expect. It's rarely a once and for all, finally and forever kind of thing. The turning points of our lives bring us face-to-face with Jesus in different ways. They come in the joys, the sorrows, the unexpected miracles, and believers who share their faith.

Like my retreat experience in high school, God allows people and events to re-direct us and transform us. For me, it was a long journey of transformations which are part of my on-going conversion. With transformation comes the responsibility to do our part to bring people to Christ and help build the Kingdom of God. But, we need to be willing vessels of the Holy Spirit who calls us to continue the journey of conversion in our own lives and commit to a deeper union with the Father. Trust that the Lord will give you everything you need to grow into a true disciple. Let the Spirit lead you so that you can lead others.