

To Our Beloved Son, Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston:

WE are happy to learn that the National Catholic Laymen's Retreat Conference will take place this year, during the month of August, in your Archdiocese of Boston.

In recent years, Religious Orders and Dioceses have conducted fruitful retreats for men and women in more than four hundred Retreat Houses in the United States of America. Although these have involved over half a million retreatants, much still remains to be done; for the words of Our Venerable Predecessor, Pius XI, are still applicable: "We regard it as certain that most of the ills of our day start from this, that 'no man thinketh in his heart.'" (Const. Apost. SUMMORUM PONTIFICUM 1922).

Of the several laudable methods for conducting retreats for the laity, the method based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola is, since their approval by Pope Paul III in 1548, the most widely used. Retreat directors, however, must never cease to deepen their understanding of the doctrinal and spiritual riches of the Ignatian text, and to express those riches in terms of the theology of the Second Vatican Council. The retreat is not to become a study of conciliar documents, but the director should present the insights of the Exercises, or of any other method he may use, in a theological context with which modern laymen will be familiar.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to dilute retreat exercises with innovations which, however good in themselves, would reduce the efficacy of a closed retreat. Such activities as group dynamics, religious discussions and seminars in religious sociology, have their place in the Church, but that place is not in a closed retreat, in which the soul, alone with God, generously welcomes the encounter with Him, and is by Him wonderfully strengthened and enlightened.

Of such souls the world has great need, as the Conciliar Constitution on the Church in the Modern World says: "The intellectual nature of the human person is perfected by wisdom, and needs so to be. For wisdom gently attracts the mind of man to a quest and love for what is true and good. Steeped in wisdom, man passes through visible realities to those which are unseen. Our era needs such wisdom more than by-gone ages, if the discoveries made by man are to be further humanized. For the future of the world stands in peril unless wiser men are forthcoming... It is, finally, through the gift of the Holy Spirit that man comes by faith to the contemplation and appreciation of the divine plan." ("Gaudium et spes", No. 15).

We pray that this year's Conference may impart to the Retreat Movement a new and lasting impetus, and to all participants revived enthusiasm and zeal; and, in pledge of richest divine graces, We lovingly impart to you, Beloved Son, to the Episcopal Moderator, directors and members of the Conference, Our special paternal Apostolic Benediction.

From the Vatican, July 25, 1966

Paul VI