

St. Mary Men's Retreat 2015 Article for Intermountain Catholic

Journey to Heaven! That was the theme and title of a book of the 5th annual St. Mary Men's Retreat of West Haven on August 7-9. The retreat took place at Bloomington, ID, and was attended by 42 men from: St. Mary Parish in West Haven; St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church of Park City, Catholic men from Malad, ID, and one attendee from Beale Air Force Base, CA. Since its inception, Fr. Gustavo Vidal, Pastor of St. Mary Catholic Church, has had one goal in mind for these retreats: To provide a safe environment for men to confront their personal "demons" and freeing them for God to transform their lives. Without exception, each annual retreat becomes ever more profound in the amazing work of God in the lives of the men who attend.

This year the men discussed how the road map to Heaven is filled with obstacles, distractions, confusion, conflicting priorities and unrelenting demands. Randy Hain, author of the book, pulls no punches, nor did the men shrink from grappling with these issues plaguing men today. There were profound moments where the Holy Spirit manifested personal "ah-hah" discoveries, deep cleansings, and extra-ordinary releases of suppressed emotions all culminating in a "great awakening". Catholic men no longer need to be repressed by the culturally driven expectations for men, but have a clear roadmap to be the men God calls each of them to be in the Church, in the home, and in the work place.

Instead, they joined forces to become "Catholic Rebels" by discussing and committing themselves to use the catholic tools suggested by Mr. Hain to combat and overcome the impediments that life throws at them. The inspiring and common sense wisdom of *Journey To Heaven* compels husbands, fathers, brothers and sons to quit being wishy-washy about their Catholic Faith and to courageously step up to the challenge God has given of us to get ourselves and our families to Heaven. If Catholic men think life's journey is about only attending weekly Mass or going to Confession once or twice a year, such men – indeed all men - need to examine the path they are currently on and apply the tools of Grace that God so richly dispenses to "run the race" and strive for the goal Christ has given us.

Key to all of this is that the men on this retreat realized no one can travel this journey alone, but that it takes the mutual support of other men to combat the pressures of life that the enemy would rather have us believe we are macho enough to struggle against and conquer on our own. As the men discovered, this is improbable, if not impossible.

Furthermore, as five years of men's retreats have so powerfully shown, bonds are forged that become stronger and deeper each year. These retreats are certainly a catalyst for discovering our weaknesses. However, it is after such retreats that Fr. Vidal has discovered men must continue to meet together to allow their mountain top experiences to translate into a lived reality. It is here, in their personal valleys, that men need mutual support to apply the principles of traveling this "journey to heaven". Therefore, monthly gatherings under the banner "Flame Keepers", allow the men to fan the Spiritual flames ignited by the retreat.

Those of you men reading this article, who have never been on a men's retreat before, should seriously pray before the Blessed Sacrament and ask Jesus to help you overcome your fears, anxieties and prejudices about attending one of these life changing retreats the next time it is offered. Speaking of which, the 6th Annual Men's Retreat will be held on August 12-14, 2016. Pictures of past retreats and details about the forthcoming retreat may be found at the St. Mary website: www.stmarysutah.org

Where are you on your Journey to Heaven?