

The Two Standards: The Way of Love + The Way of Fear

So often when we leave a weekend retreat, we are on fire with love for God. However, as time goes by, this fire may subside as life drains away the graces of the retreat. Before we know it, we have drifted away from God. “The Two Standards” meditation from *The Spiritual Exercises* (#136-148) comes to mind as a way to periodically check to see how we are living our lives. Ignatius believed that there is a battle between good and evil going on in the world and in our hearts. In this meditation, Ignatius instructs us to imagine the armies of Christ and Satan on a battlefield.

Each group has a standard or flag, which helps everyone know his or her side in the battle. First, Ignatius gets us to focus on Satan. He describes a fearful image of Satan...instructing his followers to go out in the world and ensnare our hearts so that we are not open to God’s will. To trap us, he uses wealth, possessions, honors, and pride. He also whispers that we need the praise and acceptance of others and convinces us that our accomplishments were achieved on our own.

On the other hand, Ignatius gets us to consider Christ as he stands on the great field in a lowly place. We are to listen as Christ instructs his followers to go out into the world and lead everyone to freedom. On Christ’s standard, we see spiritual poverty, insults, and humility. These lead to true freedom. Spiritual poverty means we live a life recognizing and accepting that all that we have is a gift from God. Possessions are not something to be worshipped. In regards to insults, Ignatius tells us that we are to let God’s love lead us through the illusion of self-satisfaction and approval of others to a life of serving others. We are called to a life of selflessness, and such a life will put us at odds with the world, which could result in insults and rejection. Finally, Christ calls us to a life of humility, a life of unconditional love and service for God and others.

The purpose of this meditation is to help us understand the value systems of Christ and Satan and to see which value system we are living. Though not the language of Ignatius, we can consider each side simply as “the way of love” and “the way of fear.” Jesus’ way--“the way of love”--invites us all to a deep communion of love with God and each other, which often requires letting go of what holds us back from dependence on God, accepting the inevitability of persecution, and selflessly seeking the good of others. Satan’s way--“the way of fear”--enslaves us to our insecurities of not being good enough, needing to impress or be superior to others, and thinking that dependence on God is weakness. Out of fear, we strive to achieve and claim these values to make ourselves feel worthy and successful rather than embrace ourselves as sinners who are deeply loved.

How am I living this gift of life I have been given? What values do my life say I uphold? What and who do I stand by?...When we begin to take the lowest place--to wash the feet of others, to love our sisters and brothers with that burning love, that passion which led Christ to the Cross--then we can truly say as Father Greg Boyle once concluded, “Now I have begun to live as though the truth were true, standing in the right place, standing with Christ, singing the song without the words, and never stopping at all.”