

POPE FRANCIS GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE



ON THE CALL TO HOLINESS
IN TODAY'S WORLD

Apostolic Exhortation



Part 5

**St Columba's, Culloden
Wednesday 5 September 2018**

Chapter Five: Spiritual Combat, Vigilance and Discernment

Lorenzo Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat* (first published in Venice in 1589)

“Watch yourself with all diligence, lest the enemy steals near and robs you, depriving you of this great treasure, which is inner peace and stillness of soul. The enemy strives to destroy the peace of the soul, because he knows that when the soul is in turmoil it is more easily led to evil. But you must guard your peace.”

St. Ignatius of Loyola, ‘The Meditation on the Two Standards’

- This Meditation invites us to reflect on the choice of standing with Jesus or with the way of the world.
- Ignatius believed that there is a battle between good and evil going on in the world and in our hearts. It is important that we are aware of this battle.
- In this meditation, Ignatius instructs us to imagine the armies of Christ and Satan in a big field. Each group has a standard or flag, which helps everyone know his position on the battlefield.
- First, Ignatius gets us to focus on Satan. He describes a fearful image of Satan sitting on his throne of fire and smoke and instructing his followers to go out into the world and ensnare our hearts so that we are not open to God’s will. To trap us, he uses wealth, possessions, honours, and pride. Satan starts by getting us to fixate on our possessions. Satan wants our wealth and possessions to become the focus of our lives and worldly success to be the goal of our lives.
- Satan also whispers to us that we need the praise and acceptance of others, and tells us that because of our successes, we deserve honours. Finally, Satan tries to convince us that we did it by ourselves. He tells us to be proud of what we have accomplished. He wants us to adopt the attitude of “look at me and what I have done.”
- 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. Periodically, we need to look at our lives to see where we are standing in relation to the standards of Christ and Satan. If we find that we have drifted a little close to Satan’s standard, we can strive to live a life of spiritual poverty by serving others through humble love and compassion. Remember we are called to live in this world but be of God’s world. So whose standard are you standing under?

- [<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/how-the-two-standards-meditation-can-help-outside-of-a-retreat>]

Cf. *The Lord of the Rings*, vol. III: *The Return of the King* – the battle between the army of Aragorn, and that of the evil Sauron, on the field of combat in front of Mordor.

Spiritual Corruption and Lukewarmness

Cf. Francis Fernandez-Carvajal, *Overcoming Lukewarmness: Healing Your Soul's Sadness*

NB. Dante, *Inferno*, III – the Neutrals: “those sad souls who lived a life but lived it with no blame and with no praise.” –

“These wretches, who had never truly lived,
went naked, and were stung and stung again
by the hornets and the wasps that circled them
and made their faces run with blood in streaks;
their blood, mixed with their tears, dripped to their feet,
and disgusting maggots collected in the pus.”

(*Inferno* 3: 59-60)

The Daily Examen

The *Examen* is a method of reviewing your day in the presence of God, and offers the chance to assess the dynamics of your relationship with Him. It has five steps, and usually takes 10-15 minutes:

1. **Ask God for Light:** choose a quiet space and recollect yourself. Call upon the Holy Spirit to help you be attentive to the Lord's presence in and around you.
2. **Give Thanks:** As you reflect on your day, recall those experiences that bring to mind the generosity and goodness of God. Call to mind the reasons you have to be grateful. What are you most thankful for today?
3. **Review the Day:** Carefully look back on the day just completed. Think about all of the things that happened at work and at home; think about your interactions with colleagues and family members. Identify significant thoughts, actions, and desires that speak to you about your relationship with God, with others, and with yourself. Is there something that stands out today? Speak to the Lord about those aspects and ask Him for insight to know what these things reveal about you and your relationship with Him.
4. **Face your Shortcomings:** Acknowledge those patterns of behaviour and attitudes that disrupt your relationship with God and others, and ask the Lord for mercy and peace, giving thanks for His unconditional love for you.
5. **Look Towards the Next Day:** Decide how you will act tomorrow, taking steps to leave behind those thoughts or actions that diminish your resolve to live as a committed follower of Jesus Christ. Make an act of trust in God, and ask for the grace to live your life in His love.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In warning against spiritual corruption, Pope Francis speaks about becoming “lukewarm” (no. 164-165). What are some ways to avoid being lukewarm and keep the love of Christ burning ardently in our hearts?
2. In no. 169, Pope Francis recommends that we make a daily examination of conscience, which is an excellent way to help us see what the Holy Spirit is saying to us. How might we incorporate that into our daily routine?
3. Pope Francis ends by reflecting on the role of Mary, who lived the Beatitudes as no else ever has. How can we make Mary more a part of our life of faith and prayer?

For Personal Prayer and Meditation

A well-known prayer for spiritual assistance against the temptations of the devil is the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel:

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in the day of battle.
Be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray;
and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan and all the evil spirits,
who wander through the world seeking the ruin of souls.

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father,
we pray that the whole Church will devote herself anew
to promoting the desire for holiness.
May the Holy Spirit pour out upon us a fervent longing
to be saints for the greater glory of God,
and let us encourage one another in this effort.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.