

## Retreat Opening

Welcome to this *Interior Life* five-day retreat on discernment.

You probably have a sense that God has a plan for your life. And with good reason, He tells us exactly that:

*...as He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before Him... (Eph 1:4)*

*You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb (Ps 139:18)*

*...before I formed you in the womb I knew you... (Jer 1:5)*

Our task is to listen and receive God's will for us, and to respond generously.

Of course, in our fallen world, that is easier said than done. St. Ignatius of Loyola had a particular genius for discerning the voice of God from all the false voices, and for responding to God's call.

### You Are on Retreat

You are entering into this five-day retreat to grow in faith, to grow in relationship with God and to learn from St. Ignatius, who was truly drawing from the example and teaching of Christ.

For the next five days you are on a retreat. This means you are separating yourself from the world. We know you have all your worldly responsibilities and activities and concerns, but amidst all of that you have decided to set apart this daily time for God, which is a wonderful thing. You will get the most out of this retreat if you endeavor to separate from the noise of the world (internet, TV, social media, etc) and spend daily time in silent meditation. If you're not certain how to do that, consider going on the *30 Days to Christian Meditation* retreat, and also take a look at the Introductions in the *Interior Life* mobile app.

Be assured of our prayers for you and everyone who goes through our *Interior Life* retreats –

Steve and Karen Smith

*Interior Life*

## Day 1: FOUNDATIONS OF IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT

### Spiritual vs Physical

We are a composite of physical and spiritual – body and soul (we are “enfleshed spirits”). And we live in a world that is both physical and spiritual.

Much of our day-to-day life plays out at the merely physical level. Our physical body gets hungry and we eat physical food. Our physical brain needs to learn something and we read a physical book (or watch a video on our physical soul-sucking-device). Our physical car breaks down and we take it to a physical garage. We are not at present interested in that physical level of reality.

At the spiritual level we have our own spirit, and in the language of St. Ignatius, we encounter the Good Spirit (God and Angels). It is through our spirit that we have powers of knowing and willing. The deepest workings of our mind – our conscience, our ability to meditate and contemplate, and our ability to make choices and see them through - are spiritual powers.

At the spiritual level we also encounter the *enemy*. St. Ignatius views the enemy as three, in the traditional Catholic sense: the fallen world, satan and demons, and our fallen nature. The fallen world is everything around us that tempts us into sin. Satan and demons are always prowling, looking for ways to tempt and deceive us. And our fallen nature is our concupiscence, that part of us that is given to low and earthly things and holds us back from giving ourselves fully to God (in the words of St. Paul, “I do what I do not wish, and I do not do what I wish to do.”).

Our spirit must battle against our fallen nature and is also subjected to the movements and promptings of both the Good Spirit and the enemy. Note that this retreat focusing on mysticism – drawing closer to God and understanding His will for us. The equally important counterpoint to mysticism is asceticism, which is overcoming our fallen nature through spiritual disciplines (there is much more on that in *30 Days to Christian Meditation*).

And so, when we're presented with particularly spiritual matters (related to our vocation in life, our relationship with God, and so forth) we need to be able to assess our interior spiritual movements and how they are being affected by the Good Spirit and the enemy.

### Paradigm for Discernment

St. Ignatius of Loyola developed a powerful threefold paradigm that is the foundation for all his teaching on discernment: be aware, understand, and take action.

**Be Aware:** be alert, in the moment. This means being aware of not only the physical situation and circumstances, but your responses to them. This also means being spiritually aware – doing our best to keep ourselves in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

**Understand:** this is a deep understanding, by using the best of our intellect in the company of the Holy Spirit.

**Take Action:** here we accept or reject whatever is before us. And we take action with the confidence and authority that comes with making the decision in the company of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes this process must happen in the moment. More often, we do our best to remain aware during the day, and then we go back at a later time and review the events to better understand them and decide how to take action. This is particularly the role of the *Examen* prayer – the topic of the next session.

As it happens, St. Ignatius' threefold paradigm is closely related to the three intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit – knowledge, understanding and wisdom. There is much more on the gifts of the Spirit in *30 Days to Christian Meditation*, but a quick review of the three intellectual gifts sheds light on St. Ignatius' paradigm:

**Knowledge** ("be aware"): The gift of Knowledge is a deep knowledge of God, and the things of God. This type of knowledge increases our Hope, because we become more aware of God in our life. We were made to "*know* Him, love Him and serve Him." This does not mean to know God like we know a TV character. It is to know Him intimately in our soul. Ancient Hebrew has a word for this type of knowing – *yada* - which is to know intimately, just as God knows us intimately, "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD *knew* (*yada*) face to face" (Deut 34:10)

**Understanding** ("understand"): a deep penetration of the Truth. Understanding strengthens our Faith as it reveals glimpses of the beauty and perfection of the mind of God. The Greek root of understanding is *binah*, which is also associated with "between" – as in standing between good and evil, truth and error, right and wrong, yes and no. And *binah* is also associated with "build." Thus the Gift of Understanding stands *between* knowledge and wisdom; it *builds* on knowledge and guides us in connecting the dots, so that we can act with wisdom.

**Wisdom** ("take action"): wisdom strengthens charity, because it enables us to judge and choose divine things. Wisdom, the highest of the gifts, in Hebrew (*hkhm* or *chokhmah*), is associated with wise men, sages and their students. The object of wisdom is God – to love what God loves – and so to choose Godly things. The Hebrew for wisdom is also associated with "heat" – which might call to mind "were our hearts not burning?" The gift of Wisdom stokes our interior fire for God so that we desire and choose whatever draws us closer to Him.

What's more, wisdom (*chokhmah*) is also creative:

*Him that by wisdom made the heavens.* (Ps 136:5)

*The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth.* (Prov 3:19)

That creative element is why wisdom builds on knowledge and understanding. Ultimately our Spirit-inspired knowledge and understanding must become active in the world – and that is the roll of wisdom.