

JULY 31 2025 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

It's a beautiful image—this net full of fish. The good are placed in baskets, and the bad are thrown away. Jesus is speaking about the end times, the final judgment.

But we must also remember that God is ever-loving and merciful. It is up to us to come to God. If we continually reject Him, we risk becoming like the bad fish. That said, we should never walk around with the attitude of, “Oh, I’m saved anyway, so all is good.”

If we want a life that’s even reasonably happy, we need to learn to come to God and pay attention to how He works in our lives.

In the first reading from Exodus, the tent is set up, and the cloud of God's presence descends over it. When the cloud is over the tent, no one may enter the holy of holies. At night, the cloud is lit with fire—a very visible sign of God’s presence. Everyone could see it.

But real life isn’t always so clear. It’s not always easy to read the signs and see how God is working in our lives.

Today, we also honour the memorial of St. Ignatius of Loyola—the father of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. These exercises were designed to help us see how God is working in our lives, and equally, how the devil works to lead us astray.

The Spiritual Exercises are about learning to listen—truly listen—to what is happening within us. To hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. To recognize the spiritual movements, the tug of grace, and the pull of darkness. We are caught in a mystical battle: good versus evil.

St. Ignatius, through his own life of upheaval and transformation, came to understand the need to discern this interior landscape. He developed the Exercises as a way to help others do the same.

At the heart of his teaching is the daily examen—a practice of looking inward and asking: What’s going on within me? How are my relationships? What are my thoughts and patterns? It doesn’t have to take long—maybe just 15 minutes a day. Personally, I pause several times throughout the day to ask, “How am I doing? What is happening in my life?”

This kind of personal inventory is essential. If I’m tired, I need to recognize it and rest. If I’m frustrated, I must ask how I’ll deal with that frustration—will I handle it in a healthy way or take it out on others? Coming into honest contact with ourselves is where change begins.

At Manresa, as these TV Masses air, we have seminarians concluding a 30-day silent retreat. Thirty days of prayer, reflection, and listening to God. Each day, they receive Scripture and spiritual reading material. But the heart of it is getting to know themselves and how God is at work in their lives.

The devil, of course, works on us in many ways. If someone is already living in sin—struggling, for example, with alcohol—the devil whispers, “Who cares? Just have another drink. Enjoy the moment.” The good spirit, however, speaks through the conscience: “Wake up. This won’t end well.”

As we grow closer to God, the battle doesn’t disappear—it just becomes more subtle. We begin to need help seeing what’s really happening. Sometimes, we need to talk to someone—someone who can help us reflect and discern.

St. Ignatius gives us a striking analogy: the fortified city. Think of an old European city, walled and protected. The enemy doesn't launch a frontal attack. No, they search for the weak spot in the wall—and that's where they strike.

So too with the forces of evil. They study us and ask, "Where is the weak point?" Maybe someone carries old wounds of anger. That becomes the entry point. Maybe it's an attachment to pornography. Or a personality that demands perfection, leading to criticism and resentment. The enemy finds our vulnerability and uses it.

That's why we must learn to listen deeply to ourselves. Often, a spiritual director is essential—someone who can gently reflect back to us what we may not see. The truth is, the last one to truly know me... is me. But if I am open, I can grow in the Spirit of God.

The Spiritual Exercises cover a whole range of practices. Completing a 30-day or even an Annotation 19 or 20 retreat doesn't make someone "perfect" or "finished." There are many roads to God. The Exercises offer one that is particularly helpful for busy people—people living in the world with full lives and responsibilities.

We are not monks. Most of us don't have the luxury of hours spent in contemplation. But St. Ignatius offers us a way—a spiritual path for daily life. A way to stay grounded in God's presence amid the noise.

And so, may St. Ignatius help us on our journey—help us to see, discern, and grow in love with the One who sees us always. Amen.