**How the Two Standards Meditation Can Help Outside of a Retreat**

By John Monroe

So often when we leave a weekend retreat, we are on fire with love for God. However, as time goes by this fire subsides as life drains away the graces of the retreat. Before we know it, we have drifted away from God. How can we stop this from happening?

The Two Standards meditation from the Spiritual Exercises 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. 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, honors, 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 honors. 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?

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