

Finding Christ in Coronavirus

St. Ignatius of Loyola teaches that at all times there are two opposing spirits that pull on our hearts, minds, and souls. The good spirit is any movement inside of us that pulls us toward God and God's will. The evil spirit is any movement that pulls us away from God and God's will. Ignatius exhorts us to an ever greater awareness of the ways in which each of these spirits is pulling us at any given time. A lack of awareness often leads to being led by the evil spirit without our even noticing.

God did not cause the coronavirus or "smite" us with it, but God certainly wants to use this experience to bring us closer to Him. Sadly, the evil one wants to use it too! St. Ignatius would have us ponder, then: "How might the good spirit use this moment to pull us toward God?" And, "How might the evil spirit pull us away from God?" Praying with these questions, I'm making two lists. They are a work in progress, but this is what I've got so far:

Ways that the evil spirit might use this moment to pull me away from God

- ❖ There are many who are using this moment as an opportunity to lash out or mock their opposing political party and its members. I know that political debate is a vital component of a democracy, so perhaps you might feel called to jump into the fray. But I have discerned that, for myself, these "discussions" lead me away from God and away from faith, hope and love. So if you approach me with these sorts of sentiments, I'll probably smile politely and then put some "social distance" between us. I am more afraid of being contaminated by political rancor than by a virus.
- ❖ St. Ignatius teaches that fear is favorite tool of the evil spirit. For a person striving to be good, the good spirit does not bring fear. The evil spirit will no doubt try to get to me by making me afraid of everything I touch and everyone I meet.
- ❖ The evil spirit might lead me to anger.

Ways that the good spirit might use this moment to pull me towards God

- ❖ I've been hearing the word *essential* a lot lately. A company is allowing all non-essential staff to work from home. We are encouraged to limit ourselves to essential travel. We go to the grocery store to stock up on essentials. Here at Holy Name, we've reduced our activities to the essentials: the Sacraments. In prayer, the good spirit is prompting me to reflect on the essentials of my life, things like faith, family, friendship, hope and love. These things are the toilet paper and sanitizers of the spiritual life! No virus can keep me from these essentials.
- ❖ From time to time, I contract laryngitis. It's not painful, I simply can't speak for about 72 hours. I really enjoy it (and I think the people around me do too)! I don't think God sends me laryngitis, but God uses it to quiet me down for a while. That's a psychologically and spiritually good thing. A friend said in passing the other day, "Maybe, God is inviting the whole world to a spiritual retreat."

- ❖ People frequently say “take care of yourself,” as they part. Most of the time, it’s nothing more than a polite way of ending a conversation. But lately, I’ve noticed that people look me in the eyes when they say it. And it seems to come from a deeper place inside of themselves. It’s not just a nicety. It’s an expression of love and concern. Might the good spirit be using this crisis to prompt us to greater love and care for each other?

If I follow Ignatius’s advice and become more mindful of the movements within me, I discover some toxic ways that the evil spirit is using this moment. More importantly, I discover the multiplicity of ways that God might be using it to bring us closer to Him and to each other, even as we stand six feet apart.

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