

What's it all about, anyway?

Homily for Lent 1, 2018
February 17-18, 2018

Have you ever asked the question: “So what’s life all about anyway? What is the point?”

Back in the 16th century there was teen who thought he had the answer. He would have been the envy of many a young man. If he were alive today he would have been a video game master, with games like “Call of Duty” being ones he would ace. Rather than playing video games, which of course they didn’t have in 1509, his love for everything military led him to enlist as a soldier at 17.

In his day, he would have been the talk of his home town of Azpeitia, Spain. Here was a young man who would take the world by storm and be someone! All the way to his 30th year he was making it! What a soldier, what a partier, what a popular guy.... Living the good life. That’s what its about. and then wham, at the Battle of Pamplona he was gravely wounded. A cannonball hit him in the legs, injuring his right leg and fracturing the left in multiple places.

Here was a crisis in this young man’s life that led him to re-evaluate the meaning of his life. He came to understand that although a baptised Catholic, his faith had no real bearing on how he answered the question: What’s it all about, anyway? But that cannonball was the awakening of the Spirit of God in the life of St. Ignatius of Loyola where for the first time he took his baptism seriously and became aware of something essential to living out the Christian life.

He discovered that while in this world we are in a battle, one that on this first Sunday of Lent finds expression in Mark’s concise telling of the Temptation of Jesus.

Ignatius understood that if Satan tempted Jesus, Satan will tempt us. Notice in the Temptation Narrative Mark writes:

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

Immediately after what? After his baptism in which the Spirit descends on Him and the Father announces:

You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Now here is what I would like you to understand about these words. There is more here than meets the ear. The baptismal declaration is a composite sentence taken from Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. The phrase: “You are my son”, is from Psalm 2 which describes the Messianic King, whom the nations of the world will seek to dethrone and destroy. The phrase: ‘the beloved, with you I am well pleased”, is a paraphrase of Isaiah 42:1. It is the first of four passages in Isaiah that celebrate the one who will be the faithful servant of the Lord. So what we have in Jesus’ baptism is the announcement of Jesus’ identity as the Messianic servant. Immediately after his baptism Jesus is led into the wilderness. There, for forty days, he was tempted by Satan who will call into question Jesus’ true identity and vocation.

Now let's delve into this a bit more. The noun Satan means the adversary. Satan is the chief of the fallen angels, and he is the adversary, or the enemy of humankind, especially beginning with Adam and Eve. Also, he was the enemy of Israel. He was known as the accuser of Israel. He was the one who would accuse righteous Israelites before God by calling to mind their sins and he would seek to destroy them and to damn them. So when it says here that the adversary tempted Jesus, it means Jesus is engaging in spiritual warfare with the enemy of humankind. Satan does not want us to discover the true meaning of our lives. He wants to keep us guessing.

St. Ignatius discovered during his convalesce from his injury the same thing. He realised for the better part of the first three decades of his life he had given into the adversary's temptations without putting up any fight. But now he discovered that Satan had undermined his true identity given to him in his baptism as a son of his heavenly Father. Satan always acts this way. He wants us to forget who we are as those who share in the family likeness of Jesus. We are the Father's beloved sons and daughters.

At the age of 30, Ignatius was now beginning to discover something which he described this way.

In persons who are going from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures to them, leading them to imagine sensual delights and pleasures in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins.¹

Until his 30th year, Satan had Ignatius where he could play him. His life was all about entertainment and pleasure, where he went from mortal sin to mortal sin. He was living a life in which he could care less about his baptism and what it meant for him.

The Catechism of the Church talks about sin's influence this way:

Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command.²

Always this is Satan's tactic He wants our faith in God to die in our hearts. When this happens the Catechism goes on to state:

In that sin man preferred himself to God and by that very act scorned him. He chose himself over and against God, against the requirements of his creaturely status and therefore against his own good.³

This is what St. Ignatius was doing, scorning God, up until he was 30. But then came the crisis and he discovered:

¹ <https://www.ewtn.com/series/shows/living-the-discerning-life/download/14rulesofignatius.pdf>

² Catholic Church. (2000). Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd Ed., p. 100). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

³ *ibid*

In these persons the good spirit uses a contrary method, stinging and biting their consciences through their rational power of moral judgment.

The Holy Spirit was beginning to sting and bite at his soul, convicting him of mortal sin. How did this happen? By the awakening of Ignatius' conscience. At with that awakening he began to discover what his life was for.

What I am saying now I would especially like to address to teens and young adults. As you well know, you are living in a world, both virtually and in your universities, and workplaces, where most people could care less about God. For so many today there is no concept of sin and therefore the interior voice of God called the conscience is on life support or dead. As young people today there are so many ways you're invited to live your life on your terms, however you want to. Like the young St. Ignatius you may consider your baptism unimportant. You hear the voices inviting you to be free of God, be free of the Church and be your own person, to choose yourself over and against God. Yeh, that's what life' about.

Maybe for some of you, this is counsel you have listened to, and you are living kind of like Ignatius before his encounter with the cannonball. And yet because you are at Mass or listening to the homily online, you are in some way open to the Good and Holy Spirit who is convicting you by stinging and biting at your conscience because deep down you want to learn to listen more attentively to God speak through your awakening conscience.

I hope you understand that life cannot avoid the testing that faced Jesus and Ignatius and confronts you. Jesus was tested to doubt the significance of his baptism, and you are tested to question the significance of yours too. Therefore I want to leave you with a sentence St. Ignatius wrote. It is called the First Principle. This one sentence is one I would encourage you to memorise because it can help shape how you will live your life so that your moral judgement and conscience can be awakened and strengthened. It answers the question: So what's my life about anyway, in one sentence.

God created human beings to praise, reverence, and serve God and by doing this, to save their souls.

St Ignatius discovered that life is about praising, reverencing and serving God.

To praise God is to make the choice to intentionally cultivate an interior life of prayer where you choose to make Sunday Mass a priority in your life. You will want to even prepare for Mass by reviewing the scripture readings for that day. As well, you will want to cultivate a life of personal prayer. If you are drawn to the invitation to deepen your prayer life, check out the text of the homily where I will have some suggestions for how you can do this.

To reverence God means that you want to choose to live your personal life in such a way that you listen to your conscience. You don't want to do things in private that you would not do if Jesus was literally with you in the room. How you order your social media, screen time, the quality of your conversations and friendships want to be framed by the desire to honour God. Learn to listen to your conscience and see it being like a stop light. Just as you slow down when the light turns yellow and stop when it is red, be attentive to your conscience in a similar way.

A life lived serving God is one where you want to learn to live generously in relation to other people. Jesus said he came to serve and not to be served and he calls us to imitate him. Ask yourself in what ways can I cultivate an attitude of being the kind of person that is appreciated because my life is associated with generous service.

As we take seriously what it means to praise, reverence and serve God we will increasingly be cooperating with the Holy Spirit in the saving of our souls and realize the beauty of our baptism.

May St. Ignatius pray for us as we discover the answer the question: So what is my life about anyway? Is found in this simple sentence.

God created each of us to praise, reverence, and serve God and by doing this, to save their souls.

Suggestions to deepen your prayer life.

Begin to read Scripture in a systematic way. Start with the four Gospels in this order: Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. Get a good Study Bible like the Ignatius Study Bible. You can order it here: https://www.amazon.ca/Ignatius-Catholic-Study-New-Testament-RSV/dp/1586172506/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1518898100&sr=8-1&keywords=ignatius+study+bible&dpID=51M4iptQNUL&preST= SY264 BO1,204,203,200 QL40 &dpSrc=srch.

Begin to Pray what are called the Offices of the Church. Start with Morning Prayer and then add Evening Prayer. You can go to the App store and type in “Divine Office”. It costs about \$15.00 and is a worthwhile investment. If you want to find out more about the Offices email me at frjonathan@st-peters.ca.

Learn to pray the Rosary. There are lots of apps and audio rosaries available at live streaming sites like Spotify.