

May 2019 - Lesson Guide for Chapter 5 of *Rejoice and Be Glad*  
(Spiritual Combat, Vigilance and Discernment)

([Click here](#) to read the chapter before your team meeting). Also available at the end of this document.

**Opening Prayer:** (Could be prayed aloud a paragraph at a time by different team members)

*Lord, teach me your way of looking at people:  
as you glanced at Peter after his denial,  
as you penetrated the heart of the rich young man  
and the hearts of your disciples.*

*I would like to meet you as you really are,  
since your image changes those with whom you  
come into contact.*

*Remember John the Baptist's first meeting with you?  
And the centurion's feeling of unworthiness?  
And the amazement of all those who saw miracles  
and other wonders?*

*How you impressed your disciples,  
the rabble in the Garden of Olives,  
Pilate and his wife  
and the centurion at the foot of the cross. . . .*

*I would like to hear and be impressed  
by your manner of speaking,  
listening, for example, to your discourse in the  
synagogue in Capernaum  
or the Sermon on the Mount where your audience  
felt you "taught as one who has authority."*

*Grant me, O Lord, to see everything now with new eyes,  
to discern and test the spirits  
that help me read the signs of the times,  
to relish the things that are yours, and to communicate them to others.  
Give me the clarity of understanding that you gave Ignatius of Loyola.*

—Pedro Arrupe, SJ

### **Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup> But he answered, "It is written,

'Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will give his angels charge of you,'

and

'On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written,

'You shall worship the Lord your God  
and him only shall you serve.'"

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

### **For Reflection**

1. Does Pope Francis' description of the devil and the personification of evil in Chapter 5 agree with or differ with your own experience/understanding of the presence of evil in your life or in the world around you?
2. In Chapter 5, Pope Francis frequently uses metaphors describing the necessity of lifelong spiritual warfare on our part, engaging in "constant battle" against "the forces of evil" and against "a personal being who assails us". In seeking to encourage us, he describes the rich storehouse of "weapons for spiritual combat" that we have at our disposal:

- Faith-filled prayer
- Meditation on the word of God
- The celebration of Mass
- Eucharistic adoration
- Sacramental Reconciliation
- Works of charity
- Community life
- Missionary outreach
- The Examen

As has been pointed out in lessons from the earlier chapters, the spirituality of *Voluntas Dei* and the 3 fives fit rather neatly within Pope Francis' "storehouse of spiritual weapons".

In embracing *Voluntas's* spirituality and in practicing the 3 fives, have you ever consciously thought of them as spiritual weapons in a cosmic or personal battle with evil? If not, why not? If so, why?

Lastly Francis introduces and underlines the importance of the practice of spiritual discernment, which along with the examen, offers us a path designed to reveal the meaning and purpose of our lives. He views discernment as necessary not only at extraordinary times, when we need to resolve grave problems and make crucial decisions, but in everyday life as well. He includes discernment as a means of "spiritual combat" for helping us to follow the Lord more faithfully.

**Henri Nouwen** expresses it a little differently:

Christian discernment is not the same as decision making. Reaching a decision can be straightforward: we consider our goals and options; maybe we list the pros and cons of each possible choice; and then we choose the action that meets our goal most effectively.

**Discernment is about listening and responding to that place within us where our deepest desires align with God's desire. As discerning people, we sift through our impulses, motives, and options to discover which ones lead us closer to divine love and compassion for ourselves and other people and which ones lead us further away.**

Discernment reveals new priorities, directions, and gifts from God. We come to realize that **what previously seemed so important for our lives loses its power over us.** Our desire to be successful, well liked and influential becomes increasingly less important as we move closer to God's heart. To our surprise, we even may **experience a strange inner freedom to follow a new**

**call or direction** as previous concerns move into the background of our consciousness. We begin to see the beauty of the small and hidden life that Jesus lived in Nazareth. Most rewarding of all **is the discovery that as we pray more each day, God's will—that is, God's concrete ways of loving us and our world—gradually is made known to us.**

**And per Richard Rohr:**

The spiritual gift of discernment (1 Corinthians 12:10) **is when good things can be recognized sometimes as bad things, and vice versa. It invites people into “both/and” thinking, rather than simplistic “either/or” thinking.** Both knowledge and wisdom are good, but wisdom is much better. It demands the maturity of discernment, which is what it takes to develop a truly consistent ethic of life. I admit the vast majority of people are not there yet.

Once we have learned to discern the real, disguised nature of both good and evil, we recognize that **everything is broken and fallen, weak and poor, while still being the dwelling place of God—you and me, your country, your children, your churches, even your marriage.** That is not a put-down, but **finally a freedom to love imperfect things!** As Jesus told the rich young man, “God alone is good!” (Mark 10:18). In this, you may have been given the greatest recipe for happiness for the rest of your life. You cannot wait for things to be totally perfect to fall in love with them or you will never love anything. Now, instead, you can love everything. *Adapted from Spiral of Violence by Richard Rohr.*

3. What has been your experience of discernment? What decisions, freedom, joys or sorrows has it led you to?
4. Pope Francis, Henri Nouwen, and Richard Rohr all have somewhat different ways of articulating the art and importance of spiritual discernment. Which speaks to you more and why?

### **Closing Prayer**

*Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.*

Ignatius Loyola

## CHAPTER FIVE: SPIRITUAL COMBAT, VIGILANCE AND DISCERNMENT

158. The Christian life is a constant battle. We need strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil and to proclaim the Gospel. This battle is sweet, for it allows us to rejoice each time the Lord triumphs in our lives.

### **COMBAT AND VIGILANCE**

159. We are not dealing merely with a battle against the world and a worldly mentality that would deceive us and leave us dull and mediocre, lacking in enthusiasm and joy. Nor can this battle be reduced to the struggle against our human weaknesses and proclivities (be they laziness, lust, envy, jealousy or any others). It is also a constant struggle against the devil, the prince of evil. Jesus himself celebrates our victories. He rejoiced when his disciples made progress in preaching the Gospel and overcoming the opposition of the evil one: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk 10:18).

#### *More than a myth*

160. We will not admit the existence of the devil if we insist on regarding life by empirical standards alone, without a supernatural understanding. It is precisely the conviction that this malign power is present in our midst that enables us to understand how evil can at times have so much destructive force. True enough, the biblical authors had limited conceptual resources for expressing certain realities, and in Jesus' time epilepsy, for example, could easily be confused with demonic possession. Yet this should not lead us to an oversimplification that would conclude that all the cases related in the Gospel had to do with psychological disorders and hence that the devil does not exist or is not at work. He is present in the very first pages of the Scriptures, which end with God's victory over the devil.<sup>[120]</sup> Indeed, in leaving us the Our Father, Jesus wanted us to conclude by asking the Father to "deliver us from evil". That final word does not refer to evil in the abstract; a more exact translation would be "the evil one". It indicates a personal being who assails us. Jesus taught us to ask daily for deliverance from him, lest his power prevail over us.

161. Hence, we should not think of the devil as a myth, a representation, a symbol, a figure of speech or an idea.<sup>[121]</sup> This mistake would lead us to let down our guard, to grow careless and end up more vulnerable. The devil does not need to possess us. He poisons us with the venom of hatred, desolation, envy and vice. When we let down our guard, he takes advantage of it to destroy our lives, our families and our communities. "Like a roaring lion, he prowls around, looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8).

#### *Alert and trustful*

162. God's word invites us clearly to "stand against the wiles of the devil" (*Eph 6:11*) and to "quench all the flaming darts of the evil one" (*Eph 6:16*). These expressions are not melodramatic, precisely because our path towards holiness is a constant battle. Those who do not realize this will be prey to failure or mediocrity. For this spiritual combat, we can count on the powerful weapons that the Lord has given us: faith-filled prayer, meditation on the word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic adoration, sacramental Reconciliation, works of charity, community life, missionary outreach. If we become careless, the false promises of evil will easily seduce us. As the sainted Cura Brochero observed: "What good is it when Lucifer promises you freedom and showers you with all his benefits, if those benefits are false, deceptive and poisonous?"[\[122\]](#)

163. Along this journey, the cultivation of all that is good, progress in the spiritual life and growth in love are the best counterbalance to evil. Those who choose to remain neutral, who are satisfied with little, who renounce the ideal of giving themselves generously to the Lord, will never hold out. Even less if they fall into defeatism, for "if we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents... Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross which is at the same time a victorious banner, borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil".[\[123\]](#)

### *Spiritual corruption*

164. The path of holiness is a source of peace and joy, given to us by the Spirit. At the same time, it demands that we keep "our lamps lit" (*Lk 12:35*) and be attentive. "Abstain from every form of evil" (*1 Thess 5:22*). "Keep awake" (*Mt 24:42; Mk 13:35*). "Let us not fall asleep" (*1 Thess 5:6*). Those who think they commit no grievous sins against God's law can fall into a state of dull lethargy. Since they see nothing serious to reproach themselves with, they fail to realize that their spiritual life has gradually turned lukewarm. They end up weakened and corrupted.

165. Spiritual corruption is worse than the fall of a sinner, for it is a comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness. Everything then appears acceptable: deception, slander, egotism and other subtle forms of self-centredness, for "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (*2 Cor 11:14*). So Solomon ended his days, whereas David, who sinned greatly, was able to make up for disgrace. Jesus warned us against this self-deception that easily leads to corruption. He spoke of a person freed from the devil who, convinced that his life was now in order, ended up being possessed by seven other evil spirits (cf. *Lk 11:24-26*). Another biblical text puts it bluntly: "The dog turns back to his own vomit" (*2 Pet 2:22; cf. Pr 26:11*).

### **DISCERNMENT**

166. How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit or if it stems from the spirit of the world or the spirit of the devil? The only way is through discernment, which calls for something more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift which we must implore. If we ask with confidence that the Holy Spirit grant us this gift, and then seek to develop it through

prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel, then surely we will grow in this spiritual endowment.

### *An urgent need*

167. The gift of discernment has become all the more necessary today, since contemporary life offers immense possibilities for action and distraction, and the world presents all of them as valid and good. All of us, but especially the young, are immersed in a culture of zapping. We can navigate simultaneously on two or more screens and interact at the same time with two or three virtual scenarios. Without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend.

168. This is all the more important when some novelty presents itself in our lives. Then we have to decide whether it is new wine brought by God or an illusion created by the spirit of this world or the spirit of the devil. At other times, the opposite can happen, when the forces of evil induce us not to change, to leave things as they are, to opt for a rigid resistance to change. Yet that would be to block the working of the Spirit. We are free, with the freedom of Christ. Still, he asks us to examine what is within us – our desires, anxieties, fears and questions – and what takes place all around us – “the signs of the times” – and thus to recognize the paths that lead to complete freedom. “Test everything; hold fast to what is good” (1 Thess 5:21).

### *Always in the light of the Lord*

169. Discernment is necessary not only at extraordinary times, when we need to resolve grave problems and make crucial decisions. It is a means of spiritual combat for helping us to follow the Lord more faithfully. We need it at all times, to help us recognize God’s timetable, lest we fail to heed the promptings of his grace and disregard his invitation to grow. Often discernment is exercised in small and apparently irrelevant things, since greatness of spirit is manifested in simple everyday realities.<sup>[124]</sup> It involves striving untrammelled for all that is great, better and more beautiful, while at the same time being concerned for the little things, for each day’s responsibilities and commitments. For this reason, I ask all Christians not to omit, in dialogue with the Lord, a sincere daily “examination of conscience”. Discernment also enables us to recognize the concrete means that the Lord provides in his mysterious and loving plan, to make us move beyond mere good intentions.

### *A supernatural gift*

170. Certainly, spiritual discernment does not exclude existential, psychological, sociological or moral insights drawn from the human sciences. At the same time, it transcends them. Nor are the Church’s sound norms sufficient. We should always remember that discernment is a grace. Even though it includes reason and prudence, it goes beyond them, for it seeks a glimpse of that unique and mysterious plan that God has for each of us, which takes shape amid so many varied situations and limitations. It involves more than my temporal well-being, my satisfaction at having accomplished something useful, or even my desire for peace of mind. It has to do with

the meaning of my life before the Father who knows and loves me, with the real purpose of my life, which nobody knows better than he. Ultimately, discernment leads to the wellspring of undying life: to know the Father, the only true God, and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn 17:3*). It requires no special abilities, nor is it only for the more intelligent or better educated. The Father readily reveals himself to the lowly (cf. *Mt 11:25*).

171. The Lord speaks to us in a variety of ways, at work, through others and at every moment. Yet we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God's language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light. In this way, we allow the birth of a new synthesis that springs from a life inspired by the Spirit.

### *Speak, Lord*

172. Nonetheless, it is possible that, even in prayer itself, we could refuse to let ourselves be confronted by the freedom of the Spirit, who acts as he wills. We must remember that prayerful discernment must be born of a readiness to listen: to the Lord and to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways. Only if we are prepared to listen, do we have the freedom to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas, our usual habits and ways of seeing things. In this way, we become truly open to accepting a call that can shatter our security, but lead us to a better life. It is not enough that everything be calm and peaceful. God may be offering us something more, but in our comfortable inadvertence, we do not recognize it.

173. Naturally, this attitude of listening entails obedience to the Gospel as the ultimate standard, but also to the Magisterium that guards it, as we seek to find in the treasury of the Church whatever is most fruitful for the "today" of salvation. It is not a matter of applying rules or repeating what was done in the past, since the same solutions are not valid in all circumstances and what was useful in one context may not prove so in another. The discernment of spirits liberates us from rigidity, which has no place before the perennial "today" of the risen Lord. The Spirit alone can penetrate what is obscure and hidden in every situation, and grasp its every nuance, so that the newness of the Gospel can emerge in another light.

### *The logic of gift and of the cross*

174. An essential condition for progress in discernment is a growing understanding of God's patience and his timetable, which are never our own. God does not pour down fire upon those who are unfaithful (cf. *Lk 9:54*), or allow the zealous to uproot the tares growing among the wheat (cf. *Mt 13:29*). Generosity too is demanded, for "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (*Acts 20:35*). Discernment is not about discovering what more we can get out of this life, but about recognizing how we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us at our baptism. This entails a readiness to make sacrifices, even to sacrificing everything. For happiness is a paradox. We experience it most when we accept the mysterious logic that is not

of this world: “This is our logic”, says Saint Bonaventure,<sup>[125]</sup> pointing to the cross. Once we enter into this dynamic, we will not let our consciences be numbed and we will open ourselves generously to discernment.

175. When, in God’s presence, we examine our life’s journey, no areas can be off limits. In all aspects of life we can continue to grow and offer something greater to God, even in those areas we find most difficult. We need, though, to ask the Holy Spirit to liberate us and to expel the fear that makes us ban him from certain parts of our lives. God asks everything of us, yet he also gives everything to us. He does not want to enter our lives to cripple or diminish them, but to bring them to fulfilment. Discernment, then, is not a solipsistic self-analysis or a form of egotistical introspection, but an authentic process of leaving ourselves behind in order to approach the mystery of God, who helps us to carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of our brothers and sisters.

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176. I would like these reflections to be crowned by Mary, because she lived the Beatitudes of Jesus as none other. She is that woman who rejoiced in the presence of God, who treasured everything in her heart, and who let herself be pierced by the sword. Mary is the saint among the saints, blessed above all others. She teaches us the way of holiness and she walks ever at our side. She does not let us remain fallen and at times she takes us into her arms without judging us. Our converse with her consoles, frees and sanctifies us. Mary our Mother does not need a flood of words. She does not need us to tell her what is happening in our lives. All we need do is whisper, time and time again: “Hail Mary...”

177. It is my hope that these pages will prove helpful by enabling the whole Church to devote herself anew to promoting the desire for holiness. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us a fervent longing to be saints for God’s greater glory, and let us encourage one another in this effort. In this way, we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us.

*Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on 19 March, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, in the year 2018, the sixth of my Pontificate.*

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