

# Faith Formation Lenten Accompaniment

S T . I G N A T I U S L O Y O L A P A R I S H

## ACCOMPANIMENT

LENT  
ACCOMPANIMENT  
DESERT  
DISCERNMENT  
CONSOLATION  
L'ARCHE  
TO "BE LOVED"

For most of us, Lent is envisioned as a time of personal isolation, a solitary sojourn into the desert to be assaulted by Satan, or at least the chaos of life. But actually, Lent is a time of accompaniment, that is a time for walking with God. It is also a time to walk with Jesus during his time of suffering. Not an easy or pleasant task. Yet it is a task that we are asked to do, not out of guilt, but out of love.



Many of us have taken up the duty of walking with a loved one through a serious illness or even their passing. It certainly is not an easy time but an important one. I remember being in a hospital room with my father and my family as he passed away. I recalled a term that seemed to aptly describe the moment—*painful consolation*. And while we often consider consolation to be something hopeful or uplifting, I found its pairing with the word

painful a bit of a contradiction. Yet, reflecting upon the situation, it was both painful and consoling. The pain is obvious. The consolation was the realization that I had done what I could for my dad. We, the family, had been with him when he needed us. We had done more than a duty, we had done what was right.

Now, I'm not glorifying suffering. I'm not talking about a Mel Gibson

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## The Ability to "Be Loved"

Krista Tippet began a podcast called "Speaking of Faith" back in 2003. It was intended to treat the faith dimension, the spiritual aspects of life as seriously as one would science or the economy. It ran on public

radio stations during what was called the "God Hour", early Sunday mornings. It has now been rebranded as "On Being" <https://onbeing.org/>, and while widening beyond just faith to the more existential questions of life, it still remains a

mainstay for opening minds and hearts to a reality beyond the mere physical. As their website explains their mission and scope:

"Every crisis of our age runs through fault lines of human

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## Accompaniment (cont)



“Passion” where pain and trauma seem to be first and foremost. I’m talking about accompaniment, the walking with, the companioning, the focus on someone else and their needs as more important than my own. For me, Lent is all about learning this accompaniment and this companioning. It means giving up many things to simply be with someone else. It means putting the other before me. It means turning my life around, so that it isn’t all about me. And that is tough to do. But the rewards are really great.

Rebecca Ruiz is one of the Ignatian writers that has experienced this aversion to Lent, this struggle with tough times. You may just want to check out her reflection entitled “I’m Having a Hard Time Sitting in the Desert This Lent” at Ignatian Spirituality. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/having-a-hard-time-sitting-in-the-desert-this-lent/>

## Testing the Spirits

When one says “Lent” we often jump to the feelings of guilt and shame. No wonder, so many have used these emotions as a kind of bludgeon to achieve the desired “conversion” that we seek in this season. Yet, as many of us know, guilt and shame can, and often does, lead us away from God as well as from others. We hear the voice saying to us that we are no good, that we can never be what God expects of us, that he will never love us. Of course this all is not true, yet, what we call the evil spirit, whispers such falsehoods into our ears. And we end up turning away from God rather than back to God.

Well, guilt and shame do have their place. They are part of our own recognition that things are not right, that we are not who we are supposed to be. But where these feelings lead, that’s where we find what spirit is at work. Those words that lead us back to God and to one another are the wholesome and holy ones. Those words are from the good spirit, ultimately from God. Those that assail us and lead us into darkness, into isolation and away, well they are the un-whole and unholy ones. Those are the words of the evil spirit and not from God.

Those who write about the discernment of spirits try to help us recognize the differences, even telling us that sometimes the evil one will disguise himself as an angel of light. But the greatest test, the initial one that helps to guide us, is where do these words, these feelings lead? If it is from God, it will lead to God as well as lead to the care and concern for others.

IgnatianSpirituality.Com has a couple of different articles on the topic. <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/introduction-to-discernment-of-spirits/> and <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/how-do-i-know-im-experiencing-god/>. Both are pretty good reads and helpful to keep you from being sidetracked this lent.


**THE POPE VIDEO**  
with Bishop Gene Robinson


**FORMATION  
IN SPIRITUAL  
DISCERNMENT**

That the Church may appreciate the urgency of formation in spiritual discernment, both on the personal and communitarian levels.

Challenge of humanity and the mission of the Church - March 2018

**What is spiritual discernment?**

- It is the art of interpreting in what direction the desires of the heart lead us, without letting ourselves be seduced by what leads us to where we never wanted to go. Discernment is the generic term for the practice of making decisions in my concrete life to seek and find the will of God.

### 6 things you need to know about spiritual discernment

<div style="background-color: #e0f0ff; padding: 5px;"> <b>1</b>    <small>That in our selves three different forces can act: ourselves, the good spirit and the bad spirit.</small> </div>	<div style="background-color: #ffe0e0; padding: 5px;"> <b>2</b>    <small>Where do the motions (feelings, thoughts) of our heart come from and where do they go?</small> </div>
<div style="background-color: #fff0e0; padding: 5px;"> <b>3</b>    <small>That each of these forces moves in its own direction.</small> </div>	<div style="background-color: #e0ffe0; padding: 5px;"> <b>4</b>    <small>That both the good spirit and the bad spirit act in our own feeling.</small> </div>
<div style="background-color: #e0ffe0; padding: 5px;"> <b>5</b>    <small>That God supports the good spirit, which moves us towards freedom. The evil spirit moves us towards slavery.</small> </div>	<div style="background-color: #e0ffe0; padding: 5px;"> <b>6</b>    <small>That to choose well is essential to learn to distinguish these forces and have inner freedom.</small> </div>


**Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network**

## The Ability to “Be Loved” (cont)

hearts and well-being — pain and fear and dreams and hope. Work once imagined as “soft” is urgently pragmatic. Calming fear. Expanding imaginations. Resourcing social courage and creativity. Opening the moral questions of humanity hospitably to the seeker, the atheist, and the devoutly religious. Attending to the wholeness of every person: the life of the mind, the truth of the body, and the wild mystery of the human spirit.”

It was here years ago that I heard a podcast about Jean Vanier and the “L’Arche” movement. <https://onbeing.org/programs/jo-anne-horstmann-larche-a-community-of-brokenness-and-beauty/#transcript>

The movement was a reaction to those places where individuals with mental disabilities were institutionalized (in the worst sense of the word). Rather the movement hoped to create spaces, communities where those with mental disabilities are welcomed, treated with dignity, listened to as fonts of wisdom and opportunities for tenderness. It involved a radical shift in understanding of care where the “client” is the source of wisdom and the “caregiver” is really a recipient of understanding. Henri Nouwen, a famous Dutch priest and theologian, became a member of one of the L’Arche communities. As a theologian, Nouwen originally believed that what set humans apart was their ability to reason. Through his interactions with one of the most stricken of community members, Adam, Nouwen came to see that what makes us most human is the ability to be loved. One would think that Adam had nothing to give to others. However, Adam’s openness, this acceptance of love, his willingness to simply be there for others, that was what changed Nouwen’s perspective. And helped me to see how accompaniment can be more of a gift than a burden or duty. How accompaniment can be a grace that would upend my own understanding of life’s goal and purpose.

As Nouwen wrote:

“Before this, I had come to believe that what makes us human is our mind. But Adam keeps showing me that what makes us human is our heart, the center of our being where God has hidden trust, hope, and love. Whoever sees in Adam merely a burden to society misses the sacred mystery that Adam is fully capable of receiving and giving love. He is fully human—not half human, not nearly human, but fully, completely human because he is all heart. The longer I stay with Adam, the more clearly I see him as a gentle teacher, teaching me what no book or professor ever could.”

For me, this is what Lent means. It means the kind of “turning back” that many of need, the turning away from the idols of accomplishment, of achievement, of all sorts of “doing” and turning instead back to what makes us most human and most divine, compassion and companionship.

What would I have to give up to discover that once again? Well, it might mean going into the desert, to the places of chaos where we don’t control life. That might be a homeless shelter. That might be a nursing home. That might be community center that serves recent immigrants. And that might mean places of pain and suffering. Yet, it is in these places where we will find God. And it is here that we will ultimately learn the meaning of the Resurrection.



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### To Ponder and to Share

1. We've all been through Lent before. What do you remember as being fruitful for you? What not so fruitful? So what are you going to try again?
2. Lent is a very long period. And when we encounter resistance or struggle at the beginning, we tend to give up. Yet graced moments of the past help us to persevere. What have been some of those graced moments in your past?
3. What have you shared with others about Lent? Just the difficulties and frustrations? Sharing even those may spark a conversation which is a real game changer for you or for them. So talk about Lent and talk about your hopes and dreams for both Lent and for Easter.

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**Finding God in All Things**

### NOT GOING IT ALONE

In a newsletter that focuses on "accompaniment" it seems counterintuitive to then talk about Lenten Retreats. That is, it seems wrong if you consider it as "going it alone", where you are going to figure it all out all by yourself. For most retreats, this is simply not the case. First, we go, not to be alone, but to be with God. Second, many of the retreats that you will find, whether in person or online, really come from the experiences of others. In that sense, listening to the words of others is a way of allowing others to accompany us. We don't go out to the desert alone, we do have a guide, or at least a roadmap, to help us along the way.

Part of the Jesuit tradition of mission, of being sent, was to know that we did not travel alone. For folks like St. Francis Xavier, there always was that sense of companionship that came from both letters and prayers. Sometimes when we participate in an online retreat we get the sense that, although we all occupy different rooms, different spaces, we still somehow sit in the "same" chapel and make this retreat together. We are not alone.

With that in mind, might I suggest you consider going into the desert with the companionship of other seekers while listening to podcasts like "Pray-as-you-go" or "Sacred Space". Really, you are not alone.

P.S. Both retreats are really the same.

<https://pray-as-you-go.org/article/hope-and-the-nearness-of-god-lent-retreat-2022>

<https://sacredspace.com/en/retreats/lent-2022/>

