

The *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola* primarily exist in what is more commonly called a 30-day silent retreat. I haven't yet had the privilege of a 30-day silent retreat; but have been fortunate enough to make an 8-day silent retreat.

In his *Spiritual Exercises* there is an additional section at the end where St. Ignatius speaks of the immeasurable love of God that is bestowed upon all of creation, and then asks what he might offer to such a loving God. This section is called the contemplation for attaining love.

The first thing is to call to mind the blessings of creation and redemption ... to ponder with what God has done ... and how much He has given of what He possesses ... and how much He desires to give of Himself.

And then in humility, to realize how completely dependent we are on God's generosity, and to recognize what we can offer Him in return.

*Take, Lord, and receive
all my liberty,
my memory,
my understanding
and my entire will.
All I have and call my own,
You have given to me;
to you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours;
do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace.
That is enough for me.*

Today's readings deal with blessings and curses ... both in the Old Testament reading from Jeremiah, in the Psalm, and in the Gospel reading of the Beatitudes.

Jeremiah gives us an image, mirrored in the Psalm ... of:

*a tree planted beside the waters
that stretches out its roots to the stream:
it fears not the heat when it comes;
its leaves stay green;
in the year of drought it shows no distress,
but still bears fruit.*

To me this image of stillness in the midst of plenty — is something we can all take to reflection. God desires our highest good ... and God desires to give us infinite graces and blessings. Yet oftentimes we end up either desiring lesser goods ... or else trying to come up with our own answers or solutions - independent of God's love ... independent of God's grace ... independent of God's blessings.

In Jeremiah, the Psalm, and the Gospel ... those who trust in themselves and their own designs are:

*Cursed
... like a barren bush in the desert
... stand[ing] in a lava waste

like chaff which the wind drives away*

Woe to you ...

Personally, I like the idea of grace and blessing compared to those other things.

As we draw nearer to the beginning of the Holy Season of Lent, let us examine with honesty how God has blessed us in all things. And as we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us pray for a greater insight into God's generosity in our lives ... and pray as well for the courage to offer it all to Him ... not only in humility; but with the greatest confidence that He will not leave us orphans.

Like a tree planted beside the water ... let us ... stretch out our roots to the stream ... of graces, and blessings, and mercy which God offers to us ... we who are His beloved sons and daughters, redeemed in Jesus Christ, and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.