

17th Sunday per Annum - C  
Genesis 18:20-21, 23-32;  
Colossians 2:6-14;  
Luke 11:1-13  
Little Flower - 7/28/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

This Wednesday we will celebrate the feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. A key theme in Jesuit spirituality is the discernment of spirits. This emphasis is rooted in the First Letter of St. John: "*Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" [4:1].

Today's reading from Genesis invites us to reflect on what constitutes an authentic experience of God. In RCIA classes, I always point to six signs of an authentic experience of God.

First, an authentic experience of God leads to deeper faith in God. In other words, when a person has an authentic experience of God, he or she is more willing to entrust his or her life and future to God. Also, this person is more open to the truths of faith revealed by God.

Second, a true experience of God leads to a deeper faith and confidence in ourselves. In today's first reading, Abraham had the confidence, the courage—we might even say—the nerve to bargain with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. He bargained not once but six times! The basis of his confidence, courage, or nerve was that he knew himself to be loved and chosen by God.

Third, an authentic experience of God leads to true humility. True humility recognizes our dependence on God for all that we are and all that we have. Today's Gospel contains St. Luke's version of the *Our Father*. Every time we pray the *Our Father*, we acknowledge our dependence on God. Likewise, true humility also involves the recognition that none of us are self-made men or women. Many people have influence the persons we are today.

Fourth, an authentic experience of God deepens our love for others. As St. John wrote in his First Letter, we cannot love God unless we also love our brothers and sisters in the human family [4:20].

Fifth, a true experience of God leads to joy, peace, and contentment that are not easily disturbed by trivial things. This is what Jesus referred to when he said, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid*" [Jn. 14:27].

Finally, a person who has a profound experience of God wants to have that experience again. However, the person does not become hooked on religious experience. He or she does not become a religious junkie. He or she does not look for a religious high.

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel also helps us understand how God answers our prayers even when it appears that he has not answered them. In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "*Ask and you will receive...For everyone who asks, receives.*" At the same time, we have all prayed for people, and our prayers seem not to have been answered. The explanation can be found in the final verse of the Gospel: "*If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?*" This verse suggests that whenever we pray for anyone or anything, ultimately we are asking for the gift of God's love. Jesus promises us the Holy Spirit, the gift of God's love, in answer to all our prayers.