

At the start of Lent every year we're invited to become more aware of the ways we're led by two opposing forces: good and evil. In Ignatian Spirituality these two forces are called the Good Spirit and the bad spirit – the Spirit of God who leads us into love, peace and reconciliation, and the Spirit of evil who, through deception, seeks to lead us into the opposite direction: hate, conflict and alienation from God and each other.

Let's take a peek at how the bad spirit, who is personified as the serpent, tempts us: "Does God **really** say, 'Give generously from your finances, pray every day, and fast from different things during this season?'" By sowing seeds of doubt, the bad spirit leads us into thoughts such as, "I don't need to give financially – I already give enough of my time," or "I don't have **enough** to give **more**." In this moment, I'm reminded of the story of the widow's mite in Mark 12 and Luke 21 – the woman who didn't give from what she had left over, but *everything* she had because she trusted that what she had belonged to God, not her.

The bad spirit also leads into thoughts such as, "I haven't got enough time to pray every day," or "I don't need to pray."

Personally, I get challenged by these thoughts every single day. The bad spirit also leads us into deceptive thoughts about fasting such as "I don't need to fast." All these thoughts and temptations stand in direct contrast to what God says in Scripture, in Tradition and through the Magisterium. To embrace such thoughts and temptations, or to hold on to them, is to pursue the bad spirit, the serpent, the evil one – call it what you will.

What, then, does the Good Spirit say? What's the Good News today? How am I being led? Or more importantly, how am I

responding? The Gospel begins with, “Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness.” The Good News *is* that we, too, can develop the eyes to see and ears to hear the ways Holy Spirit speaks, invites and prompts us. Don’t fall into the trap of the bad spirit who says, “Nah, that’s not for you. Coming to Mass and receiving Eucharist is enough. You’re fine just the way things are. Let’s stay comfortable.” These are the words of the deceiver.

Perhaps the easiest way to make my point – that we can indeed know we’re being led by Holy Spirit – is to share a personal experience. On Friday morning, I experienced being led by Holy Spirit – and I know that it was the Good Spirit because I was led into love, peace and reconciliation. These are the three main criteria.

I was very conscious that on Ash Wednesday, I’d not yet decided what to do for Lent. Do I just give up some unhealthy food like potato chips or hot chips? What good would that do? Do I pray more? Well, sure, but at the moment, my diary is packed every day of the working week between 8am and 6pm. And so, after Mass on Wednesday morning I began praying, “Tell me what you want me to do, O God. Lord, show me the way.” I prayed that on Thursday too, but it wasn’t till Friday morning that God answered. I was on the off-ramp from the Bruce Highway to Roy's Road, driving to 9am Beerwah Mass, when all of a sudden, the thought was **given me** to fast from **emotion-driven responses** during Lent; refraining from responding to others with frustration or anger by ***pausing***... and seeking to understand. It’s one of my greatest challenges, but I knew that this was Holy Spirit leading me because it’s a practice which leads me into love, peace and reconciliation. It’s not going to be easy, and I’m going to need God’s help, but I’m confident that it’s God’s will, not my own.

The quiet prompting of the Good Spirit, leading us into love, peace and reconciliation, is how we know. The bad spirit always pulls us inward — toward comfort, self-protection, and subtle excuses. The Good Spirit always draws us outward — toward trust, surrender, and concrete acts of love. Lent is a school of discernment. It's a season in which we learn to recognise the voice of the One who leads us into freedom. It's a voice that is specific. It will touch something real because it will ask something of us.

So this week, pay attention. When a gentle prompting arises — to pray, to give, to fast, to apologise, to forgive — don't dismiss it too quickly. Don't explain it away. Test it by its fruit. Does it lead to love? To peace? To reconciliation? Because every time we choose the voice of the Good Spirit, we step out of deception and into freedom. May this Lent be a time when we learn to recognise Jesus' voice — and have the courage to respond. Amen.