

Beloved Finitude

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I told my girls they could pick out one thing at the bookstore — and that thing had to be a book. No stuffies. No toys. No games. A book.

So, out of the gate they were awash in disappointment.

I went ahead and narrowed down their choices to three titles I knew we'd all like. My eldest nodded, shrugged, said she was fine with any of them — you know, the kind of preteen display of indifferent gratitude a parent yearns for. That left my youngest, who studied the texts with a careful, discerning eye.

Finally, she stepped back, nodded to herself, looked me square in the face and said, 'Let's get all of them.'

'I told you that you could only pick one,' I said, well past the point of regret for my spontaneous act of generosity.

'But I want them all. Why can't we just get all three?'

'Because that wouldn't be making a choice,' I replied.

My daughter nodded at me like I was the dumbest person on the planet, gave me the old, Yeah, duh, that's what I don't want to do, Dad, don't you get it? face.

But I held firm. And she was forced to return to her meticulous deci-



sion-making efforts. By that I mean she did 'eeny, meeny, miny, moe'.

Ignatian spirituality and our faith life are built upon discernment, upon discovering and acting upon the unique set of life experiences, personal and professional desires, and internal and external patterns that the Spirit weaves into our lives. In so doing, we become the person God dreams that we will be; we live out our particular vocation.

But before we can employ Ignatian rules for decision-making, we have to accept what might be an uncomfortable-yet-necessary fact of life: We need to make a choice. We can't be everything. We can't do everything. We can't have everything. We are



inherently limited, finite creatures.

And that's a good thing. Finitude can clarify the mind. Finitude can set our sights on that which is infinite: God. And in setting our sights so high and so holy, we necessarily remind ourselves what we are not: gods.

We all have choices to make, big and small. Some are easy; some wriggle around in our brains for days and weeks and months. Some may seem downright impossible.

I wonder: Are we stumbling over the choice we have to make? Or, are we stumbling over the fact that we have to make a choice at all?

Put differently, are we unclear on the more desirable outcome? Or, are we frightened and frustrated that we

have to eliminate possible outcomes in the deciding?

Decisions are not always easy to make. That's why St Ignatius gives us so many tools for discernment. But before we can begin, we must accept our own necessary limitations. And so, this week, no matter what diverging roads lie before you, no matter what choices you're wrestling with, I invite you to stop and sink into your beloved finitude. To realize that you can't do everything and have it all — and that's okay.

Because ultimately, we don't want it all. What we want is God's unique and essential dream for us. And to do what God wants, which is never more than we can do!