

As you know, there are many cyber-criminals out there trying to hack into our computer systems. That's why the Archdiocese has priests and parish staff periodically view on-line training modules describing common "phishing" tactics, whereby the hackers try to get us to let them into our secure internet systems.

Turns out I'm not great at recognizing these attacks. A few months ago, I finished a video on phishing – and passed the (very easy) test at the end. Piece of cake. The problem is that the next day the company secretly sent me one of their fake phishing attacks to give me a real test . . . and rather than send it to security, I fell for it.

But I'm obviously not the only one. The main point in the videos is that the criminals' tactics are all about getting us to act hastily out of fear of some kind. They try to scare us and then use that fear to get us to react without thinking it through. They tell us we have only a short time to click on the link, the organization will suffer, we'll look bad in the eyes of our superiors if we don't act right now (the fake

email suggests). They play on our fears – and those fears all too often open us up to bad actors.

I see that is an analogy for one facet of what is happening in Jesus' parable today of the wheat and the weeds. Note how the slaves seem eager to pull up the weeds right away. As I read the parable, the slaves are acting out of stress. They are upset at the adversary's malicious deed that undid their planting. It's all wasted. And maybe the Master is upset. Let's get this mess cleaned up now! But Jesus, the Master, seems more patient and is willing to wait and let things take their course. Maybe the Enemy is using a devious strategy. "[I]f you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until the harvest."

The peace and patience that Jesus the householder demonstrates here, is reflected in The Spiritual Exercises at St. Ignatius of Loyola, the greatest work on how we are to discern what God wants for us in life. Back in 2018 I had the privilege of taking a

30-day silent retreat, following the Spiritual Exercises. There were many blessings from that month, but today I want to share two of St. Ignatius' spiritual discernment insights.

First, Rule 5, "In time of desolation never make a change." By "desolation" St. Ignatius means times when we experience turmoil of the spirit, darkness of the soul, inclination to worldly things, when we're restless, slothful, spiritually tepid. If you are in that state of desolation, wait to make, or change, any important decision until you return to a time of consolation. "Consolation" means when you feel peace, gratitude, love, hope in life. (And that consolation will return, if we're patient. That is another of St. Ignatius' teaching).

I see this mistake all the time. Many vocation, marriage, divorce, and career mistakes can be avoided when this rule is followed. Think: is this what's happening in your life right now? Are you in desolation? If so, then have patience! Things look different,

twisted, in the dark. Wait until the light comes back to make or change that decision.

The other rule for today is related: Don't react in haste to new inspirations or impulses. It isn't just the state of our soul that impacts discerning God's will. It also takes time and prayer. The Devil tries to make us act in haste. He is just like the phishing criminals – or, rather, they copy him! Hurry! Act now! You'll miss out! When you feel the urgency to rush into some action, even a seemingly good act (pulling up weeds) . . . stop, take a breath.

St. Ignatius says the inspirations of God fall on our souls like a drop of water on a soft sponge, quietly, peacefully absorbed. But the working of the enemy of our human nature feels like a drop hitting a rock – noisy, hard. And we must not react immediately when the devil hits our minds that way with one of his temptations. Again, patience is needed in our discerning God's will for us. Most of my big mistakes as a Pastor come from saying "Yes" or "No" too quickly.

Think of your own life: have you ever regretted hitting that “send” button seconds after doing it? You received that nasty email, and you just had to sit down immediately and let justice speak! Wouldn’t it have been better to wait until tomorrow to reply? That is a minor example of what St. Ignatius is talking about. In the parable Jesus is saying, “Act too quickly to pull up even weeds and it could be harmful.”

I’m not talking about procrastination. And sometimes events won’t allow us time for much prayer and reflection. But what I am saying is that God doesn’t rush us. He never shoves us – the drop splashing on the rock. That’s what the Devil’s prompts feel like.

Perhaps this all seems obvious to you. “Yeah, yeah, don’t make decisions when I’m depressed. Don’t rush. Duh.” But it easier to do in theory than it is in real life – the difference between passing a training video test – and spotting a real phishing attack. I bet that many of us right now in this church are in a state of desolation -- and

contemplating a big decision. Stop. Take time for consolation to return in God's own time so as to act with peace of soul.

The Devil is a scammer. A liar and cheat. He's always running a game on us – phishing expeditions. But Jesus is giving us permission – and a warning – don't rush in the spiritual life. As we make decisions along life's road towards heaven, there will be wheat and weeds, so we must act in the light of God's grace and time.