

Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola

The First Principle and Foundation

God created human beings to praise, reverence, and serve God, and by doing this, to save their souls. God created all other things on the face of the earth to help fulfill this purpose. From this it follows that we are to use the things of this world only to the extent that they help us to this end, and we ought to rid ourselves of the things of this world to the extent that they get in the way of this end. For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things as much as we are able, so that we do not necessarily want health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long rather than a short life, and so in all the rest, so that we ultimately desire and choose only what is most conducive for us to the end for which God created us.

3 Modes of Discernment

1. divine manifestation that leaves little room for uncertainty; e.g., St. Paul's encounter with Jesus
2. Consolation, desolation, temptations
3. Indifference and rational considerations

Rules of Discernment

(Translation by Fr. Timothy Gallagher OMV)

Introduction

God

Consolation

Accept <—

1. Awareness

2. Understanding

3. Taking Action

The Enemy

Desolation

—> Reject

- Ignatius: thoughts and feelings: head and heart all matter
- We either fundamentally move toward God or toward serious sin

Rule 1: for persons going from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is accustomed to propose apparent pleasures to them, leading them to imagine sensual delights and pleasures, in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins. In these persons, the good Spirit uses a contrary method, stinging and biting their consciences through their rational power of moral judgement..

Rule 2: in persons who are going on intensely purifying their sins and raising from good to better in the service of God our Lord, it is proper to the evil spirit to bite, sadden, place obstacles, disquieting with false reasons so that the person may not go forward. It is proper to the good Spirit to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing and taking away all obstacles, so that the person may go forward in doing good.

Rule 3 (spiritual consolation): I call it consolation

1. when some interior experience is caused in the soul through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord. Consequently, it can love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but only in the Creator of them all.
2. likewise when it sheds tears, that moved to the love its Lord, whether out of sorrows for one's sins or for the passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other things directed ordered to His service and praise.
3. Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity. All interior joy that calls and attracts to heavenly things, and to the salvation of one's soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord.

Rule 4 (spiritual desolation): I call desolation all the contrary of R3, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to low and earthly things, disquiet from various agitations and temptations, moving to lack of confidence, without hope, without love, finding oneself totally slothful, tepid, sad, and as if separated from one's Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts that come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts that come from desolation.

Rule 5: in times of spiritual desolation, never make a change to a spiritual proposal, but be firm and constant in the proposals and determination in which one was the day before such desolation, or in the determination in which one was in the preceding consolation

- Because as in consolation, the good spirit guides and counsels us more, so in desolation the bad spirit, with whose counsels we cannot find the way to a right decision

Rule 6: although in desolation we should not change our first proposals, it is very advantageous to arm ourselves intensely against the desolation itself, by more prayer, meditation upon much examination, and upon extending ourselves in some suitable way of doing penance

- Means - prayer: petition, ask God for help
- Means - meditation: call to mind the truth of faith, memory of God's goodness, scriptures of hope
- Means - much examination: instead of reacting, stand your ground and look at what is going on; where is the entry point
- Means - suitable penance: courage to go against gratification, e.g., wait 15 mins before internet/binging/TV or just visit the treadmill

Rule 7: let one who is in desolation consider how the Lord has left him in trial in his natural powers, so that he may resist the various agitations and temptations of the enemy, since he can resist with the Divine help which always remains with him, though he does not clearly feel it

- The Lord has permitted consolation being taken away, but always leaving sufficient grace to safely get through desolation and stay on track toward God

Rule 8: Let one who is in desolation work to be in patience, which is contrary to the vexations which come to him, and let him think that he will soon be consoled; diligently using the means against such desolation as is said in Rule 6.

Rule 9: There are 3 principal causes, that is, God's reasons, for which we find ourselves desolate:

1. because we are tepid, slothful, or negligent in our spiritual exercises, and so through our faults spiritual consolation withdraws from us
2. To try us and see how much we are and how much we extend ourselves in His service and praise without so much payment of consolations and increased graces
 - Grow to love God for God's sake
 - The more we are tempted, the more we are loved by God
 - Without desolation, we will remain spiritually immature
3. Is to give us recognition and understanding so that we may interiorly feel that it is not ours to attain or maintain increased devotion, intense love, tears or any other spiritual consolation
 - It is all grace, all a gift
 - Roots us in humility

Rule 10: let the one who is in consolation think how he would conduct himself in the desolation which will come after, taking new strength for that time.

- Accept and cherish God's grace, make the most of it as long as God permits it
- Not fears and anxiety about future darkness, but storing up gracefully
- If not storing, the coming desolation can completely undo us
- Possible means
 - a. Prayer of petition for strength in future desolation
 - b. Meditation on truths that will sustain in spiritual desolation
 - c. Consideration of the value of spiritual desolation for growth
 - d. Reflection on past personal growth through spiritual desolation
 - e. Resolution to make no changes in times of spiritual desolation
 - f. Review of these Ignatian points
 - g. Planning for specific situations of spiritual desolation

Rule 11: let one who is consoled seek to humble himself and lower himself as much as he can, thinking of how little he is capable in times of desolation without such grace or consolation. On the contrary, let one who is in desolation think that he can do much with God's sufficient grace to resist all his enemies, taking strength in his Creator and Lord.

- portrait of a mature discerner
- Consolation: don't be naïve that we are strong
- Desolation: God is in control, trusting in God, not despairing

Rules 12-14 moves from desolation/consolation to the enemy's temptation

- desolation involves heaviness of heart on the level of my relationship with God
- Temptation is a deceptive suggestion of the enemy

Rule 12: The enemy acts like a woman in being weak when faced with strength, and strong when faced with weakness, for it is proper to a woman when she is fighting with some man to lose heart and to flee when the man confronts her firmly; and on the contrary, if the man begins to flee, losing heart, the anger, vengeance and ferocity of the woman grow greatly and know no bounds

- The enemy is a coward
- Nip it at the bud; hit the head of the camel when it first pokes into the tent

Rule 13: likewise he conducts himself as a false lover, in wishing to remain secret and not be revealed. For a dissolute man who speaking with evil intention, makes dishonorable advances to a daughter of a good father, or a wife of a good husband, wishes his words and persuasions to be secret; and the contrary displeases him very much, when the daughter reveals to her father, or the wife to her husband his false words and depraved intention, because he easily perceives that he will not be able to succeed.

- Seek a wise advisor, confessor, spiritual director
- The enemy wants us to remain in isolation, by pride, by shame, by despair
- Should not be just with anyone, but a spiritual person, someone who knows the enemy's tactics
- Break the spiritual silence

Rule 14: likewise he conducts himself as a leader, intent upon conquering and robbing, for just as a captain of an army in the field pitching his camp and exploring the fortifications and defenses of a stronghold, attacks it at the weakest point.

- The enemy is very astute of our weakest point: we need self-knowledge and honesty
- Our spiritual defense is only as strong as our weakest point

Personal Discernment

- day to day discernment
- Discernment of a spiritual gift
- Discernment of a vocation

Preamble

- the final goal of discernment is for the greater glory of God
- Discernment is about choosing between two goods. You cannot discern whether or not to commit a moral wrong.
- Discernment does not guarantee certainty in knowing God's Will. It is about making a sincere decision with honesty.
- Discernment cannot be done in a vacuum. It is more like a scientific experiment: you gather data, you test a few scenarios, and you observe the results. In this case, you observe your own indifference/consolation/desolation

Process

1. beware
 - Toward God or toward the Enemy
 - external data: experiences, truths, facts
 - Interior data: thoughts, imaginations, heart, emotions, spirit
2. Understand
 - Consolation, desolation or temptation
 - Indifference: pros and cons
3. Take action
 - Consolation: Accept
 - Desolation: reject
4. Always consult a spiritual person
 - All discernments should be validated by another discerning person, community and/or the wider Church

Group Discernment

Preamble

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Process (for group discernment)

- Each option is presented with its rationale and implications, both in choosing it and not choosing it
- A time of questions and clarifications is allowed on the facts
- Individuals take the information to prayer, considering one option at a time:
 - if I were to embrace it, do I experience consolation or desolation, or indifference?
 - Honestly consider if there were any reasons for the consolation/desolation: are there any personal reasons, e.g., fear, attachments, pride, familiarity, previous commitment, etc.
 - If these are not truthful reasons, ask for the grace of abandonment to surrender them to God.
 - Add to the information any additional pros and cons for the option.
 - Examine your consolation/desolation once again.
 - Repeat this process if necessary.
- In the large group, each person takes turn sharing succinctly the fruits of their discernment. Do not modify your sharing because of what others share. Share only what you got previously from prayer. This should be limited to no more than 1 minute.
- Only after the first round is completed, when everybody has been heard, may people make response.
- If there is a convergence of discernment, we can make a decision here. Otherwise, the group can decide if there is need to repeat the above process, or reword the options, or postpone the decision.