

Ignatian Discernment

- Ignatius' rules for discernment are primarily about how to deal with desolation – to set us free from being pushed around blindly by forces we don't see. When pay attention to our experience and can name it as desolation, we take off the blindfold, and are able to fight back!
- Rules 5-8 are all about how to fight back:
 - *Rule 5: **Don't change decisions*** that you made in times of spiritual consolation (when the Holy Spirit was the one leading you and your natural inclinations could be trusted).
 - *Rule 6: "**Move in the opposite Spirit**"* – if it's the Enemy who is trying to lead you through desolation, then the way to fight back is to choose the opposite of how you are feeling right now. This is not only a slap in the face for the Enemy, but it's a choice to do what you can be confident that God would be wanting from you.
 - *Rule 7* reminds us that **we are never tested beyond our strength**, and encourages us that God will always provide (even if we don't feel it) enough to make us able to do what is the right thing.
 - *Rule 8: "**Remember consolation!**"* Consolation and desolation come in cycles. Neither will last forever. The Enemy will try to make you feel like it's always been this way and will always be this way, and so tempt you to give up. Fight this by actively choosing to remember times when you have felt God close to you.
- The balancing rule to this is *Rule 10: "**when in Consolation, remember Desolation**"*. Consolation and desolation come in cycles. Neither will last forever. Rather than just living for the moment, then, when you're in consolation, remember that it won't last, and do your best to store up what you can of the experience so that when desolation comes (for come it will), you'll have enough to keep going.
- *Rule 11: We are utterly dependent on God for everything.*
 - **In consolation**, we can often forget this, and to even kid ourselves that the reason we're feeling this way is that we're doing something right. So **we need to continually remind ourselves that all that we have is gift, given by God**. In this remembering, we grow in humility and dependence on God for all that we have.
 - In desolation it is easy to fall prey to despair. Then it's important to remember that God is utterly trustworthy. **Desolation is a time of stepping out and trusting that God's gifts are still there for us, even though we can't feel them.**
- Ignatius turns then from the consolation/desolation dynamic to warn us of the Enemy's primary tactics to trip us into desolation. Ignatius wants us to see how the enemy works so that we can recognize it and take action.
 - *Rule 12:* The enemy is no stronger than a spoilt child – if we stand up to him, will give in, but if we give in, he will push harder. In the same way, when we are willing to be strong facing a temptation, it won't have any power over us. But if we begin to listen, give in, lose heart, be afraid...the enemy will close in and press for victory.
 - *Rule 13:* The next tactic of the enemy is to gag us. If he can convince us not to speak with someone who is wise in the ways of God about what is going on in our spiritual life, then half of his battle is won. We can fight back by talking to a good confessor or someone wise in the ways of the enemy.
 - *Rule 14:* In our lives, the enemy will work to find our weakest point and attack there to destroy the whole of our spiritual lives. Our defences are only as strong as our weakest point. We need to search out our weakest points now, and work to build them up by confessing sins, getting healing prayer, seeking professional help...

- How does all of this apply when I'm trying to discern what God is calling me to do?
- Ignatius distinguishes three ways that we can discern the will of God in a specific situation:
 - *First Way*: When God makes His will so clear to us that without hesitation we naturally follow his call. These circumstances are rare moments of grace from God.
 - *Second Way*: If we are regularly practising our Examen and paying attention to the dynamics of spiritual consolation and desolation in our lives, then we can trust the way that we are inclined to in times of spiritual consolation and inclined away from in times of spiritual desolation. This is the most common way that God will show us His will.
 - *Third Time*. Where we might struggle to follow our patterns of consolation and desolation, or need to make a decision and can't afford to wait for the patterns of consolation and desolation to confirm it, Ignatius recommends waiting for a time of "tranquillity" – ie. we are not heavily weighed down by desolation, but are in a space where we can at least view our life objectively. (This is also a good method to use to confirm decisions made in the above two "times")

Ignatius provides two methods for decision making at this time:

- *First Method*:
 1. Place before your mind the object about which you want to make a choice.
 2. Make sure that you are in a state of indifference, not leaning in favour of either side of the choice you are about to make.
 3. Pray a prayer of surrender, entrusting the whole process to God's guidance, and letting go of your own prejudices, asking that the outcome will be according to his will.
 4. Write down a list of the pros and cons of the prospective decision.
 5. Come to a rational decision, based on these factors, as to the best choice to make.
 6. Offer this decision to God and ask Him to "confirm it if it is for His greater service and praise."
- *Second Method*:
 - Make sure that you are detached from the outcome of your decision and that all you desire is the will of God.
 - Now place yourself in the position of someone else with your choice to make. What advice would you give them? Give yourself the same.
 - Place yourself at the moment of death and consider what decision you would then wish to have made. Make the same now.
 - Place yourself on Judgment Day and ask yourself what choice you would then wish to have made. Choose that course of action now.
 - After reaching a decision, offer the choice to God in prayer, asking Him to confirm it by His grace as in the previous method.