

## **Rules for the Discernment of Spirits**

*drawn from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius (The Examen)*

*Notes on a half-day retreat by Fr. Jim Sorra for the SFX Gospel of Life committee*

Some of us are by nature melancholic (prone to feeling sad, desolate, & depressed), but regularly upbeat folks have their down days, too. Since desolation comes for us all – no exceptions – every one of us needs *Hope*. So, how do we live out Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises when desolation comes?

Answering that question is what winning the battle for spiritual joy is all about, and that means using the weapons St. Ignatius developed for us - his **Rules for Discernment**. St. Ignatius developed a rule for everything, even one that governs how a Jesuit walks. These rules are based on his *principle and foundation* of "praise & thanks":

- † Our deepest desire is to be loved, so a good first step is our commitment to grow in holiness and to use contemplative prayer so we may become intimate with God.
- † Prayer is not about figuring out God; it's about *receiving*. I am here to become aware of the God of love and compassion; that He desires to become incarnate in me. I am created to praise, love, reverence, and thank Him, and to work out my salvation.
- † All created things are intended for proper use, so I am to use them to achieve this end and to be free of them if they are obstacles. To do this we need to become indifferent to all created things. Since there is only one who hates me, I must only want what helps me towards the end for which I was created: to be in Heaven with God.

We encounter good and bad spirits throughout our lives, both in and out of prayer. We need to recognize them and respond effectively to the bad spirits, and our goal is to be aware of the workings of the Spirit through the Ignatian *discernment of spirits* so we can respond in the best way to Him.

We enter into contemplative prayer like *Lectio Divina* or *The Jesus Prayer* as a servant. At the **Transfiguration** Peter et al became caught up in building tents instead of attending to Jesus in His transfigured form.

- † So, if something "shimmers" during contemplative prayer I stay with it.
- † When contemplating a sunset we experience the Oh! Just revel in it – don't think about it.
- † Meditation, on the other hand, is thinking about the sunset.
- † If a distraction keeps occurring during contemplation, it may be Christ wants me to focus on it.

Any movement of the heart is either *Desolation* or *Consolation*. Each plays a critical role in our spiritual lives, so we need to follow our *Consolation* and reject our *Desolation*.

- † Consolation – Lifts up & draws me closer to God.
- † Moves me to be filled with or influenced by love of God; i.e. deep remorse for sin would be *Consolation*
- † Always make decisions in spiritual Consolation
- † *Desolation* – breaks fellowship with God; a movement of darkness of the soul; a tepidness,
- † It's a loss of hope, a sense of separation or of being left dry; It leads downward into slothfulness
- † Aquinas: sloth is "sorrow in regard to spiritual good"; medieval monastics called it "the noonday devil"
- † Fr Barron says sloth is the deadliest of the deadly sins: I know there is a spiritual good but it so depresses me I can't muster any energy for it. I am consumed with boredom, indifference, lethargy for the spiritual level of life; I tend just to rest in it
- † Based on all this, should we ever make decisions in spiritual Desolation? NO!

### Three levels of the heart (Christian anthropology of the Heart):

- † Level I – Surface level thoughts, feelings, & desires; most base level where we feed our appetites (the flesh) and therefore are prone to **concupiscence** (Avoid living at this level and making decisions here)
- † Level II – Fundamentally psychological: Thoughts, Feelings, & Desires
  1. Psychological *Desolation* & *Consolation*
  2. Family relationships; deep moods; ethnic identity, character, & temperament
  3. Physiology (DNA, aging, hormones, etc.)
  4. Sexual desire
  5. Cultural assumptions: economic, beauty, customs, myths, ethos, etc.
  6. Pleasure/Pain principle
- † Level III – Fundamentally spiritual: Thoughts, Feelings, & Desires
  1. Spiritual *Desolation*
  2. Spiritual *Consolation*: the fullness of life
  3. Affective Movements = spirits
    - † Intellect (thoughts)
    - † Emotion (feelings)
    - † Will (choices)
  4. Imagination/Memory
  5. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

### The movement of good spirits vs. evil spirits reflects the direction of my life

- † These spirits are always acting in ways contrary to that direction
- † Good spirit is not necessarily Holy Spirit; it could be a redeemed part of ourselves in the world which can help us
- † Evil spirit not necessarily Satan; it could include the fallen part of ourselves in the world which can hurt us
- † On *Desolation's* trip from bad to worse the good spirit will encourage me to turn back by stinging my conscience as an act of mercy; i.e. excommunication (hard *consolation*)
- † On *Consolation's* path from good to great the evil spirit will discourage me with lies and illusion, but the good spirit will chase me with truth and what is real.
- † If I am living in spiritual *Consolation* I will be able to be indifferent to sickness or health, poverty or wealth, disdain or fame, death or life (indifference mentioned earlier in Ignatius' *principle and foundation*).
- † For example, when I pray in *Consolation* for something and it is not granted I am able to be elated because I know God's will is for me not to have that.
- † Recall God's three answers to prayer: Yes, not now, and I've got something better.

I'm saving Gaitley's view of the Ignatian responses to *Desolation* or *Consolation* until next week, but I will give you Fr. Jim Sorra's thumbnail on each set to tide you over. I don't want to leave you in the lurch.

### **How do I respond to *Consolation*** (Fr. Jim Sorra)

1. Receive, Receive, Receive! Do NOT let anything prevent you from receiving *Consolation*.
2. Wherever and whenever you receive *Consolation*, go back for MORE!
3. Prepare for your *Desolation* by holding onto your *Consolation*.
4. Store it up and when confronted by *Desolation* go back to a time when the Lord sustained your *Consolation*.

### **How do I respond to *Desolation*** (Fr. Jim Sorra)

1. Increase prayer
2. NEVER make a decision about spiritual life while in this state, especially in a permanent way.
3. Stand AGAINST *Desolation* – in the same way that Francis of Assisi did. Of all things in the world, Francis despised lepers most. Encountering a leper on the road he felt terrified and revolted, but not wanting to transgress God's command he dismounted from his horse and ran to kiss him and give him alms. Afterwards Francis looked around and could not see the leper anywhere. Francis is moved by something - love, the Holy Spirit - to move beyond his own comfort, despite his visceral disgust for the leper. In order to enter into a new way of living in the world he embraces the other. "What had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body." Might that last line be an excellent description of spiritual *consolation*?
4. Consider your dependence upon God
5. Practice *patience* – Joy & *Consolation* will return.

### **Other Tips from the *Examen***

- † Ask God to show you favors you receive
- † Ask Holy Spirit to show you the choices He presents and your response
- † Pray words of reconciliation and resolve

### **Prayers**

#### ***Prayer for Generosity*** (St. Ignatius of Loyola)

Lord, teach me to be generous.  
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;  
to give and not to count the cost,  
to fight and not to heed the wounds,  
to toil and not to seek for rest,  
to labor and not to ask for reward,  
save that of knowing that I do your will.

***Radiating Christ Prayer*** by Cardinal Newman

*Here is a beautiful prayer which was recited daily after Communion by Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her Sisters of Charity. This Prayer is also known as the **Fragrance Prayer**. Cardinal Newman was as an Anglican priest who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1845 at the age of 44, and was subsequently ordained a Catholic priest. He was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI on September 19, 2010. Let us send our petitions to Blessed Cardinal Newman as he waits to be canonized.*

Dear Jesus, help me to spread Your fragrance wherever I go.

Flood my soul with Your spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly, that my life may only be a radiance of Yours.

Shine through me, and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel Your presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus!

Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine, so to shine as to be a light to others.

The light, O Jesus, will be all from You; none of it will be mine.

It will be you, shining on others through me.

Let me thus praise You in the way in which You love best, by shining on those around me.

Let me preach You without preaching, not by words but by example, by the catching force of the sympathetic influence of what I do,

the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to You.

Amen.