

## **Rules 10-11** *Maintaining Spiritual Balance*

We continue with our summer series on St. Ignatius' *Rules for Discernment*. Rules 5-9 speak about spiritual desolation, i.e., the trial of disquiet in our soul and the feeling that we are separated from the Lord.

As we have seen, Ignatius has a lot of rules about spiritual desolation. He does so because he knows that desolation is a basic problem for many people trying to grow closer to God. The evil one knows that his tactics of discouragement, doubt, fear, anxiety, and deception (about God and ourselves) are extremely effective. Therefore, Ignatius gives us much help in overcoming such tactics.

Let us now look at Rules 10 and 11, which greatly aid us in maintaining spiritual balance as we grow in our spiritual life.

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

After so many rules that speak of desolation, it is refreshing to return to spiritual consolation. However, even when speaking of consolation, Ignatius reminds us that the good times will not always remain (at least in this life).

There is a classic saying about this rule: When in consolation, finish the pie. Enjoy all the consolation that God wants to give you. When you experience God's closeness and goodness, receive it generously and thank Him for it. It is a gift to deepen your faith in and love for God.

The wisdom of this rule is that Ignatius reminds us that while consolation is delightful, it is only heaven that we will experience it permanently. In this life, there are fluctuations between spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation. The fluctuation can be a brief moment, a few minutes, an hour, several days, weeks, or even years.

That said, Ignatius reminds us that when in consolation, we must be prepared for spiritual desolation when it returns. We do this by preparing how we will **think** (e.g., God is a loving Father who provides for me and will never give me more than I can handle) and how we will **act** when desolation returns. Examples of action include: While in desolation, I will not make a change (Rule 5). Additionally, I will continue praying, meditating, and extending myself in penance (Rule 6). Finally, I will ask God for help (Rule 7) and be patient (Rule 8). By preparing well, the darkness of desolation will be less dark and less lasting.

**Eleventh Rule:** *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 the time 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.*

Rule 11 gives us a picture of a discerning person who is able to maintain spiritual balance between the fluctuations of spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation.

In spiritual consolation, we can be tempted to be overly confident and forget that consolation is a gift. Consolation without humility leads to spiritual ruin. On Holy Thursday, Peter said to Jesus, "I will never abandon you." We all know what eventually happened.

In spiritual desolation, we can be tempted to be overly discouraged because we feel abandoned and helpless. Therefore, Ignatius reminds us that in desolation we can *do much with God's sufficient grace to resist all his enemies, taking strength in his Creator and Lord.* As Peter was sinking in the water, Jesus reached out His hand to catch him (Matt. 14:31).

In short, the beauty of Rule 11 is that we see the two halves of spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation together. We remain humble and grateful in consolation, while we trust and beg for help in desolation.

**Practically:** In this life, there will be alternations between desolation and consolation. Therefore, the key is to become spiritually aware of the movements in your heart and then taking the appropriate action. Of course, this takes practice.

When God feels close, prayer is easy, and the flowers seem to smile at you, accept God's gift and thank Him for it. When God feels distant, prayer is difficult, and you feel anxious/restless, reject any lies that creep in, be patient, and maintain your daily devotions. Remind yourself, "This too shall pass." Stay the course and know that God will not abandon you.



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