

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius  
August 4, 2013  
Spiritual Ponderings  
Spiritual Discernment Part I

For the last two and half years, I have been blest by the opportunity to attend a three weeks a year, three year program facilitated by the Institute of Priestly Formation concerning Contemplative Spiritual Direction. I have learned so much about prayer through this program that my relationship with God has never been stronger. I have also realized how much that I did not know about prayer despite the fact that I was blest to have nine years of seminary training under my belt. I know that there are many people out there who desire to pray but because of a lack of knowledge often find it a fruitless and useless experience. Over the next two months, I would like to devote my Spiritual Ponderings toward the topic of prayer. This week and next week, I will focus on some topics concerning prayer and then for the next seven weeks I would like to focus on St. Ignatius's rules of spiritual discernment.

**1. Acknowledge – Relate – Receive – Respond (A.R.R.R.)**

I would like to start these reflections on prayer by inviting to you to simply pray and read over the Sunday Gospel and while doing so open yourself up to this process that the Institute of Priestly Formation (in bold) lays before us as a method of prayer:

You have sat with God's Word. You have entered into the scene. Now, once you feel God is saying something to you, **ACKNOWLEDGE** what stirs within you. Pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, and desires. These are important.

Once you've acknowledged what's going on inside your heart, relate this to God. Don't just think about what's going on. Don't simply think about God. Don't think about how God might react. **RELATE** to God. Tell him how you feel. Tell him what you think. Tell him what you want. Share all your thoughts, feelings, and desires with God. Share everything with Him.

Once you've shared everything with God, **RECEIVE**. Listen to what He's telling you. It could be a subtle voice you hear. It could be a memory that pops up. Maybe He invites you to re-read the Scripture passage. Perhaps you feel something in your body. Perhaps he invites you into a still, restful, silence. Trust that God is listening to you and receive what He wants to share with you.

Now **RESPOND** however you want. It could be more conversation. It could be a resolution. It could be tears or laughter. Respond to what you're receiving.

Finally, **JOURNAL**. Keep a record this season of what your prayer was like. It doesn't have to be earth shattering, it could be a sentence or two about what God told you or how that day's reflection struck you. Regardless of how you do it—Journal.

**2. Thoughts, Feelings, and Desires**

While praying it is important to pay careful attention to your thoughts, feelings, and desires. These thoughts, feelings, and desires are the beginning and substance of prayer. These are the things that God wants you to communicate to Him and how He communicates to you.

**3. Two methods for praying with Scripture.**

Option 1

1. Find a quiet place where you focus on what you are about to do and can be silent. Try to find a place with as few distractions as possible.
2. While getting comfortable remember not to get too comfortable to where you might fall asleep.
3. Pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance. A simple prayer like "Holy Spirit, please help me be attentive to the Word of God that I am about to read. Help me to be alert to the stirrings of my heart, so that I may feel your presence and discern your will for me" or something similar is a great start.

4. Begin to slowly read the passage of Scripture until something strikes you. There is no rhyme or reason at this point to why the passage may strike you. It is something of a gut feeling that this passage for one reason or another stands out to you.
5. Begin to reread that passage of Scripture over and over again while allowing yourself to meditate/reflect/chew on the words.
6. Pay close attention to your heart, what are you feeling, what is God saying to you? Eventually you may even find yourself sitting still and in silence feeling God's presence. Stay there as long as you can.
7. As you come to the end of your prayer, take the time to make some sort of resolution as you return to everyday life.

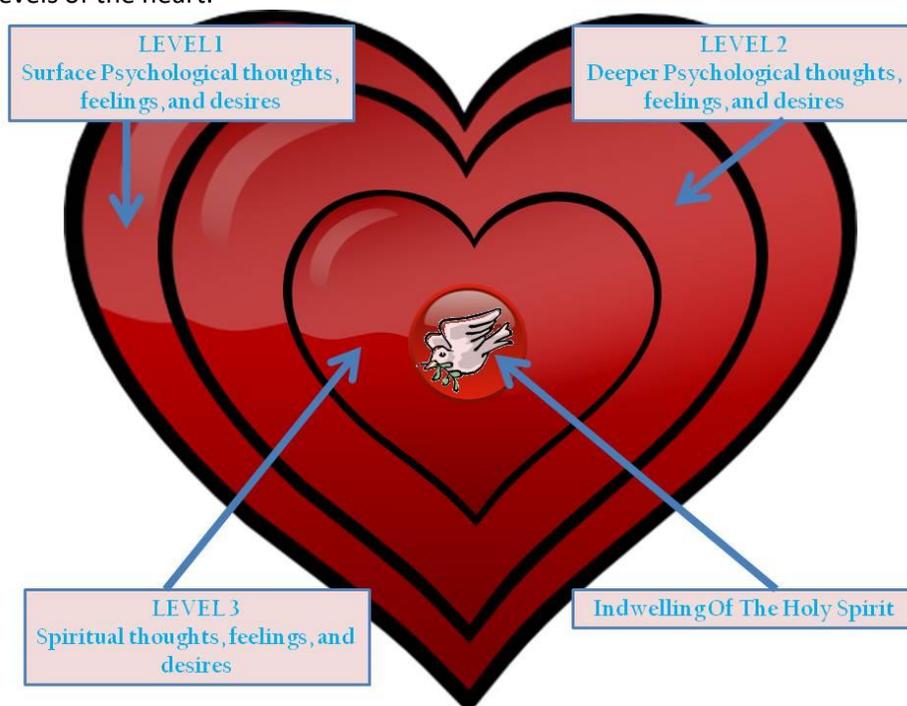
### Option 2

1. Find a quiet place where you focus on what you are about to do and can be silent. Try to find a place with as few distractions as possible.
2. While getting comfortable remember not to get too comfortable to where you might fall asleep.
3. Pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance. A simple prayer like "Holy Spirit, please help me be attentive to the Word of God that I am about to read. Help me to be alert to the stirrings of my heart, so that I may feel your presence and discern your will for me" or something similar is a great start.
4. Slowly begin to read the passage of Scripture imagining yourself in the Biblical scene. Using your imagination try to get the story to become as real as possible to you.
5. Play close attention to the details, how does the weather feel, who is present, what are people's reactions.
6. Play close attention to your heart, what in this scene is touching your heart or driving you to act? How are the other characters behaving? How are their behaviors affecting how you feel and what you believe?
7. As your prayer time comes to an end, compose a little prayer asking God to help you bring His love to the **world**.

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**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**August 11, 2013**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Spiritual Discernment Part I**

As we continue to look at this thing we call prayer, I think it is important to reflect upon something that spiritual writers are calling the three levels of the heart.



The idea behind the three levels of the heart has allowed me to go deeper into my relationship with God for a couple of reasons. The first is that it reminds me that unless I quiet myself down and intentionally reflect on what is going on in my life and what I am feeling I can live a very superficial life. In the midst of my counseling for depression one of the techniques that my counselors gave me was called Mindfulness which I think is very similar. Sometimes we are moving too fast through life to really know what is happening and how we feel in order to address the issues. We tend to go from one crisis to another without pondering why the crises seem to happen. I also like the idea of comparing my need to stop and check in with myself to how I have to take my car into an auto-mechanic for a tune up. I cannot see all the interior things that may need adjusting while I am driving. It is only when I stop and look under the hood and check the tire pressure can I truly see what is going on with my car. The three levels of the heart allows me to do this with my life.

On level one, I find it is important to know whether I am sick or not. If I am not feeling well because of a fever, I know praying will not come easily. If I find myself hot and ready to pass out from a lack of water, I should get a glass of water before I sit down to pray so my thirst does not distract me. Right now what are you feeling on level 1? Are you hot or cold? Happy or Sad? Etc.

On level two, we go a little deeper to discover what might be some psychological reasons for me to feel the way I do. Maybe I am feeling hot because I am nervous about spending time with a male in authority because I have never had a good relationship with my father? This would be an example of a level two feeling.

Finally on a level three, we get to the deep spiritual thoughts, feelings and desires. An example of this is maybe I find myself being impatient with others because on level three, I am feeling unloved by God and not very special at the moment so I am trying to direct people's attention away from myself and onto other people.

As I conclude today's reflection on the three hearts, I would like to share with you how this worked in my prayer life once as I reflected on the story of the woman caught in adultery.

***But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more." (John 8:1-11)***

On the first level of my heart, I realized that I had read this passage many times before and I was fascinated by the fact that no one wrote down what Jesus was scribbling in the sand. It is the only reference in Scripture to Jesus actually writing and no one wrote it down.

On the second level of my heart I began to feel afraid to go deeper with the passage and as I persisted with the passage I began to realize that I felt a connection with the woman caught in adultery. I had the feeling as if I had known her from somewhere. I began to think about how Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners and so she was probably a woman that Jesus knew very well and she could have possibly been at his dinner table the night before. This was even perhaps why she was chosen by the Pharisees and scribes for this attack on Jesus. I began to feel how embarrassed she must have felt knowing that what she had done was against Jesus' teaching and how startled she must have been when Jesus did not condemn her.

On the third level of my heart, I began to realize that there was a particular sin that was bothering me because I had this feeling that “I should have known better.” I began to recognize a call from God to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and confess this sin and receive His mercy knowing that like the woman caught in adultery that God did not care whether or not I should have known better. He just wanted the opportunity to forgive me.

You can see how by peeling back each layer of the heart, I was able to receive much more from my prayer than if I just stayed on the surface level of my heart.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**August 18, 2013**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Spiritual Discernment Part I**

St. Ignatius of Loyola through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and his own experience developed a set of fourteen rules for the discernment of spirits. Today let us reflect on Rules 1 & 2

1. Rule 1

**St. Ignatius Rule:** In the persons who go from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is commonly used to propose to them apparent pleasures, making them 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 the opposite method, pricking them and biting their consciences through the process of reason. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** In a person moving away from God in his or her life by committing one mortal sin (a sin that has three of the following: grave matter, full knowledge, and full intent) after another, he or she will feel the Holy Spirit as causing discomfort to their conscience in order to get them to stop their evil ways. The evil spirit on the other hand encourages the sinner to continue sinning through providing physical and emotional pleasure.

**Reflection:**

The first rule of St. Ignatius’s fourteen rules of discernment focuses on a person who’s relationship with God is falling apart. A good Scripture example of this is King Herod as he has John the Baptist killed. King Herod, who was a Jew in name only, and was known for his evil ways (John was not the first person he had murdered and he was in an unlawful marriage with his brother’s widow) is enticed by the devil to commit another sin (have John murdered) through apparent pleasures his nieces seductive dance and his desire to remain popular with his guests. He has John killed. In Mark’s Gospel we hear: “And King Herod heard *of it*, for His name had become well known; and *people* were saying, ‘John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him.’” (Mark 6:14). We can see therefore how the Holy Spirit is poking King Herod’s conscious. He feels so guilty that he has mistaken Jesus for John the Baptist being raised from the dead. In a similar way when we do bad things, it is because we foolishly believe that these things will bring us lasting pleasure but the Holy Spirit pains our conscious to let us know that what we are doing is evil.

2. Rule 2

**St. Ignatius:** In the persons who are going on intensely cleansing their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord, it is the method contrary to that in the first Rule, for then it is the way of the evil spirit to bite, sadden and put obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, that one may not go on; and it is proper to the good to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing, and putting away all obstacles, that one may go on in well doing. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** In a person who is striving to live a good and holy life by developing one’s relationship with God and trying to avoid sin the Holy Spirit encourages him or her through providing physical and emotional pleasure. The evil spirit though tries to sidetrack the individual from doing God’s will by causing discomfort to their conscience by

providing doubts. The devil only has two lies: “You are not good enough” and “You are alone”. Both of these we know to be false because of the love God has for us.

**Reflection:** St. Ignatius of Loyola’s rule number 2 is the first rule to deal with a person who is moving closer to God. St. Ignatius was perceptive enough to see that when a person begins to follow God the Holy Spirit provides physical and emotional comfort and the evil spirit begins to attack the person by making the person doubt rather they are capable of doing what God. If we look at the temptations of Christ, we can see the devil taunting Him saying that He was not capable of doing the Father’s will. This “you are not good enough” goes directly against what Jesus heard at His baptism “You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” The “you are alone” temptation is the temptation that the devil used against Adam and Eve. The devil basically told them that God was not on their side and that God was using them. This is why one of the most important titles of the Lord is “Emmanuel” – which means “God is with us!”

Summarize: If you are moving away from God the evil spirit tempts you further by providing you physical temporary pleasures that ultimately lead you empty and the Holy Spirit stings your conscience trying to bring about conversion. If you are moving toward God then the opposite is true. The Holy Spirit provides pleasure and the devil provides stings always trying to make us think that we cannot follow God’s will.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**August 25, 2013**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Spiritual Discernment Part I**

St. Ignatius of Loyola through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and his own experience developed a set of fourteen rules for the discernment of spirits. Today let us reflect on Rules 3 & 4.

#### 1. Rule 3

**St. Ignatius:** Of Spiritual Consolation. I call it consolation when some interior movement in the soul is caused, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord; and when it can in consequence love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but in the Creator of them all.

Likewise, when it sheds tears that move to love of its Lord, whether out of sorrow for one’s sins, or for the Passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other things directly connected with His service and praise.

Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy which 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. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** Spiritual Consolation is any movement of the heart in which one feels close to or a desire to be close to the Lord. This reaction can be one of happiness like being in the embrace of a love one or it can be one of tears when we realize that we have harmed a love one but also realize the one that we love has forgiven us. True spiritual consolation always leads to an increase in oneself of hope, faith and charity.

**Reflection:** In rule 3 St. Ignatius tries to give a name to the good feelings that one receives as he or she strives to follow God. These good feelings or consolations as St. Ignatius calls them only comes to one who is moving away from sin and toward God. The important thing to remember about consolation is that these good feelings always lead us closer to God and are not based on material items.

#### 2. Rule 4

**St. Ignatius:** Of Spiritual Desolation. I call desolation all the contrary of the third rule, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of different agitations and temptations, moving to want of confidence, without hope, without love, when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from his

Creator and Lord. Because, as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts which come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts which come from desolation.

**My Explanation:** There are times in our life when it “feels” like God is not present. It is important to remember that God is always present whether we feel Him or not. Imagine if you can being in a totally dark room and then all of a sudden being hit in the face with a spotlight. While you would no longer be in the dark you would at the same time feel like you were because of the brightness of the light. Throughout the Scripture Jesus breaks out into prayers thanking the Father for all that He has and these prayers are spoken from a place of consolation.

**Reflection:** In Rule 4 St. Ignatius gives name to the biting or stinging feeling the devil uses to make us doubt our ability to follow God’s rule. It feels very much like God is absent even though He is actually present. The best example of desolation in the Gospel is the Agony in the Garden and the Crucifixion. In both places Jesus felt that the Father was absent but in reality the Father was there sustaining Him through these horrible ordeals. The important thing to realize about desolation is that God is always present. If God stopped thinking about a part of the universe (no matter how big or how small) it would no longer exist. God has to be closer to us than our very breath for us to exist.

**Summarize:** To summarize rule 3 &4 I would like to turn to the famous “Footprints in the Sand” prayer by Mary Stevenson: **One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. - Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there were one set of footprints. This bothered me because I noticed - that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints. So I said to the Lord, "You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there have only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, you have not been there for me?" The Lord replied, "The times when you have seen only one set of footprints, is when I carried you."** The moments in which we see two sets of footprints are times of consolation and the moments that we see only one set of footprints are times of desolation. We believe God to be absent but He is actually carrying us.

