

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**September 1, 2013**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Spiritual Discernment Part II**

It is hard for me to believe that September is already here. As we continue looking at St. Ignatius's rules of discernment, I invite you to go back and look over rules 3-4 so that we can have a good handle of what spiritual "consolation" and "desolation" are in regards to the Rules of St. Ignatius. Today let us reflect on Rules 5&6

1. Rule 5

**St. Ignatius:** In time of desolation never to make a change; but to be firm and constant in the resolutions and determination in which one was the day preceding such desolation, or in the determination in which he was in the preceding consolation. Because, as in consolation it is rather the good spirit who guides and counsels us, so in desolation it is the bad, with whose counsels we cannot take a course to decide rightly. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** It is important to realize that God never causes desolation. He permits it but does not cause it. If we are feeling desolation it is important to realize that it is the devil trying to persuade us to give up our good resolutions and faith in God. It is kind of like an athlete who is preparing to run a race. As he prepares there are days in which he loves doing his training routine and there are days in which he would rather sleep in. If he is going to win the race (or at least be at his best) he must remain faithful to his training regimen.

**Reflection:** The important thing about Rule 5 is to realize that we are talking about spiritual desolation and not physical desolation. For example if you are unhappy (desolate) because you are in a miserable job and you are offered a new one feel free to take it even though you are feeling desolate because your desolation is physical not spiritual. You can still feel God's presence in your life even if you have a miserable job. If however you do not feel God's presence in your life it is important not to change any of your spiritual routines. For example in a moment of prayer, I feel God calling me to go to an extra Mass during the week and I start doing so and I feel God is with me. A few weeks later when I do not feel God in my life, I should not stop going to that extra Mass. I really like the image of the athlete above.

2. Rule 6

**St. Ignatius:** Although in desolation we ought not to change our first resolutions, it is very helpful intensely to change ourselves against the same desolation, as by insisting more on prayer, meditation, on much examination, and by giving ourselves more scope in some suitable way of doing penance. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** One must not simply try to wait out one's feelings of desolation, but rather one should, rely on God's grace, fight against it by doing more prayer, meditation, and self-examination. To use the example of the athlete from Rule #5; when he does not feel like running, then he should not only run but also push himself to do a little more.

**Reflection:** The length of the desolation is really up to God but there are some things that we can do to shorten its length with God's grace. The first thing is to simply maintain course and keep doing the good things that we have been doing. The second thing is that we can also do a little more. I have a couple of friends who are not always the best at communicating and when I want to get in touch with them and they do not return my phone calls, I begin to text message, Facebook, and E-mail them. Eventually, I wear them down and they are reading to talk. By praying more, St. Ignatius noticed that God often ends the desolation sooner.

**Summarize:** Rule 5 & 6 in St. Ignatius's rules of discernment are all about what a person should do when they do not feel God's presence in their life. The first thing they should do is not make any life altering decisions (once again this has to be spiritual desolation) and following that advice St. Ignatius tells us that we should not simply sit around and wait but rather we should fight against desolation by committing to more prayer, Examen, and meditation. The result being similar to that of an athlete who does not want to do his practice run of five miles so he runs five and half miles to improve his dedication.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**September 8, 2013**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Spiritual Discernment Part II**

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 7 & 8

1. Rule 7

**St. Ignatius:** Let him who is in desolation consider how the Lord has left him in trial in his natural powers, in order to resist the different agitations and temptations of the enemy; since he can with the Divine help, which always remains to him, though he does not clearly perceive it: because the Lord has taken from him his great fervor, great love and intense grace, leaving him, however, grace enough for eternal salvation. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** Remembering that God never causes desolation and admitting that God does permits desolation. It becomes important to ask oneself “why is God allowing in me to be tested this way?” After a while a parent must take off her child’s training wheels, if her child is to master riding a bike even if that means the child may fall a couple of times in the process.

**Reflection:** We must always remember that God does not cause desolation. He does not sit around thinking of ways to torture us. He does however permit desolation so that we can grow, learn, and/or mature. We know that bad things happen in the world because God respects our free will and He wants us to freely choose Him. This means two things one is that He has to allow us to choose things that are not Him (sin) and second He has to allow us to grow and mature. I like the image of a father teaching his son how to play baseball. When the father begins to teach his son how to hit he does so by pitching underhanded to him. The father gives him a good slow ball that the son can hit with his big red wiffle ball bat. This not only gives the son joy at succeeding (hitting the ball) but the boy has also learned the valuable skill of trying to hit the ball with the bat. If the boy is going to get better though, the father will eventually have to throw harder stuff at his son. Once again this is not because the father loves his son less now that he is older but rather because he wants his son to advance in skill level and love of the game. St. Ignatius encourages us in rule 7 to think about why God has allowed us to go through a period of feeling as if he is absent despite the fact that He is very much present. It is easy to follow through if we know that there is a purpose for what we are suffering.

2. Rule 8

**St. Ignatius:** Let him who is in desolation labor to be in patience, which is contrary to the vexations which come to him: and let him think that he will soon be consoled, employing against the desolation the devices, as is said in the sixth Rule. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** When we are feeling desolate we can become very impatient with ourselves and with others. At the same time we need to never take the devil lightly so when we feel tempted to become slothful or neglectful in our prayer life we must resist these temptations to the best of our ability. Never forgetting to rely on God despite the feeling that God is absent.

**Reflection:** St. Ignatius in Rule 8 informs us that it is important for us to be patient with ourselves and not to become frustrated, annoyed, and aggravated with ourselves in periods of desolation. When we feel that God is absent in our lives we can feel as if we have done something bad but remember there is nothing we can do that can separate us from God. We must simply wait out the devil’s illusion that God is absent.

**Summarize:** When we are in desolation we should remember that it is a trick from the devil and that there is nothing that can separate us from God. We need to keep moving forward with our spiritual life. I like this passage from Romans 8:31-39: *What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but*

*handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him? Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who acquits us. Who will condemn? It is Christ [Jesus] who died, rather, was raised, who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? It is written: "For your sake we are being slain all the day; we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:31-39.*

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**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**September 15, 2013**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Spiritual Discernment Part II**

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 9 & 10

1. Rule 9

**St. Ignatius:** There are three principal reasons why we find ourselves desolate.

The first is, because of our being tepid, lazy or negligent in our spiritual exercises; and so through our faults, spiritual consolation withdraws from us.

The second, to try us and see how much we are and how much we let ourselves out in His service and praise without such great pay of consolation and great graces.

The third, to give us true acquaintance and knowledge, that we may interiorly feel that it is not ours to get or keep great devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is the gift and grace of God our Lord, and that we may not build a nest in a thing not ours, raising our intellect into some pride or vainglory, attributing to us devotion or the other things of the spiritual consolation. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** Why does desolation happen? The first God allows desolation to respect our freewill. God will not force Himself upon us. The second reason is that God wants to make sure that we will persevere in prayer despite not receiving warm feelings from Him. The third and final reason God allows desolation is to prevent us from being to prideful and reminding us that all we have is a grace ("a gift").

**Reflection:** In Rule 7 St. Ignatius encourages us to find the meaning behind the times that we are in desolation. In Rule 9, St. Ignatius gives us three reasons why God permits desolation. The first reason is because God respects our free will. If we are making no effort to develop a relationship with Him and then He will not force Himself upon us. The second is that He wishes to make sure we love Him and not the good feelings that we receive when we pray. By continuing to pray when it is hard shows us and Him our love for Him is something that lasts in good times and in bad. Finally the third reason is so that we can remain humble and realize that consolations are not a reward for doing good. Something we can feel that if I do good things I can make God magically appear and God corrects this attitude by sometimes letting us feel desolation even though we have done nothing but good things.

2. Rule 10

**St. Ignatius:** Let him who is in consolation think how he will be in the desolation which will come after, taking new strength for then. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** When we feel God's presence in our life, it is good to prepare ourselves for our next experience of desolation.

**Reflection:** In Rule 10 we receive the first advice that St. Ignatius gives to someone who is feeling consolation (the joy of feeling God presence in one's life) and that piece of advice is to plan for a time in which we don't feel God's presence (a time of desolation). How many times do we receive warnings from officials about things we should do to prepare for emergencies like stock up on water, flash lights and batteries, etc and we ignore them? I am thinking right now of the number of people who pay no attention to flight attendants who are giving safety instructions. St. Ignatius is very forthright with this point prepare for a time of desolation in a time of consolation.

**Summarize:** If we take the advice in Rule 10 to heart and prepare for a time of desolation while we are in consolation, it might be a good place to start preparing by looking at rule 9 and seeing the three reasons why God allows desolation. Our spiritual desolation to do list that we create in a time of consolation may start off with 1) examine my prayer life, 2) say a prayer for thanksgiving, 3) read favorite Scripture passages. Most importantly know that times of desolation will always come no matter what you do as the seasons come and so the best we can do is be prepared to deal with them with God's grace.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**September 22, 2013**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Spiritual Discernment Part II**

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 11 & 12

1. Rule 11

**St. Ignatius:** Let him who is consoled see to humbling himself and lowering himself as much as he can, thinking how little he is able for in the time of desolation without such grace or consolation.

On the contrary, let him who is in desolation think that he can do much with the grace sufficient to resist all his enemies, taking strength in his Creator and Lord. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** When we find ourselves being consoled (feeling God's presence) we need to think to ourselves "except for the grace of God there go I," and remain humble. When we find ourselves as being desolate (feeling as if God is absent) we need to remind ourselves that with God all things are possible.

**Reflection:** Rule 11 encourages us to live a balance life. When we find ourselves filling good because we feel God's presence (consolation) we should not get to prideful because we are not the cause of our time of consolation. God is. When we find ourselves filling bad/low because we cannot feel God's presence (desolation) we should not be too hard on ourselves for once again we are not the cause of our desolation. I like to think of this rule in terms of the virtue of humility and for me the most important thing to remember is that all virtues are in the middle of two vices. For me the visual image for me is that of a soccer goal. If I shoot too far one way (pride) then I am sinning and if I shoot too far the other way (self-hate) then I am sinning. It is only when I shoot between the poles and hit the net have I scored the goal (the virtue of humility).

2. Rule 12

**St. Ignatius:** The enemy acts like a woman, in being weak against vigor and strong of will. Because, as it is the way of the woman when she is quarrelling with some man to lose heart, taking flight when the man shows her much courage: and on the contrary, if the man, losing heart, begins to fly, the wrath, revenge, and ferocity of the woman is very great, and so without bounds; in the same manner, it is the way of the enemy to weaken and lose heart, his temptations taking flight, when the person who is exercising himself in spiritual things opposes a bold front against the temptations of the enemy, doing diametrically the opposite. And on the contrary, if the person who is exercising himself commences to

have fear and lose heart in suffering the temptations, there is no beast so wild on the face of the earth as the enemy of human nature in following out his damnable intention with so great malice. – St. Ignatius

**My Explanation:** Remembering that St. Ignatius was a product of his time period, it might be better to think of the enemy as a bully instead of a weak woman. Often bullies appear scary but when confronted directly back down immediately because they are acting out of fear.

**Reflection:** Starting with Rule 12, St. Ignatius gives three rules on the different tactics of the devil. Please do not get caught up on his term “acts like a woman.” I encourage you to think in terms of the devil being like a big bully. A bully gets his or her power from the amount of fear they inspire. If they bully is unable to inspire fear then they have no power and run away. In Scripture look at how the devils flee from Jesus for they know that they cannot intimidate Him. Jesus does not even lift a finger to dismiss them because He simply tells them to leave and they do.

**Summarize:** Rule 11 reminds us that following God is at one time scary because we know there will be good times and bad times ahead but at the same time is not scary because we know that God is with us. When I think of rule 11 I think of the Israelites in the Desert when they felt too proud they forgot all that God had done for them and built the golden calf and when they felt too low they forgot all that God had done for them and complained to Moses and Aaron about God. The most important thing is to remember what God has done for us how He has consoled us in the past and how He has led us out of desolation in the past. Rule 12 is the first of three rules that demonstrate different insights St. Ignatius had into the ways the devil work. The first being that devil is a bully and that if directly confronted with the grace of God the devil flees.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**September 29, 2013**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Spiritual Discernment Part II**

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 13 & 14

1. Rule 13

**St. Ignatius:** Likewise, he acts as a licentious lover in wanting to be secret and not revealed. For, as the licentious man who, speaking for an evil purpose, solicits a daughter of a good father or a wife of a good husband, wants his words and persuasions to be secret, and the contrary displeases him much, when the daughter reveals to her father or the wife to her husband his licentious words and depraved intention, because he easily gathers that he will not be able to succeed with the undertaking begun: in the same way, when the enemy of human nature brings his wiles and persuasions to the just soul, he wants and desires that they be received and kept in secret; but when one reveals them to his good Confessor or to another spiritual person that knows his deceits and evil ends, it is very grievous to him, because he gathers, from his manifest deceits being discovered, that he will not be able to succeed with his wickedness begun. – St. Ignatius of Loyola

**My Explanation:** There is often a feeling of a need to be secretive with the devil’s temptations as if one needs to be sneaky and not get caught because others would not approve of the actions he is suggesting morally and/or this action he is proposing will produce shame when completed. The best way one can fight this is to be forthright and honest with a trusted individual (a spiritual director or counselor) or a trusted group of individuals (a support group or accountability group).

**Reflection:** In Rule 13 St. Ignatius once again gives us an insight into how the devil works. He uses the image of the devil being a licentious lover because for the devil to keep you wrapped up in sin he makes you feel guilty about it and tries to

in some ways spiritually blackmail you into keeping up this same sin or worse for fear that your sins will be made public. By making your sins public though would take away the temptation of sin. I think this is one of the reasons why God gives us the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation for we always have a place to go to tell someone (the priest who serves as God's instrument) and know that he will not share it to others. If one does not feel comfortable with a priest or sometimes for long term avoidance of a sin support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous can be a great help in fighting the devil and all his temptations.

## 2. Rule 14

**St. Ignatius:** Likewise, he behaves as a chief bent on conquering and robbing what he desires: for, as a captain and chief of the army, pitching his camp, and looking at the forces or defenses of a stronghold, attacks it on the weakest side, in like manner the enemy of human nature, roaming about, looks in turn at all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and aims at taking us. – St. Ignatius of Loyola

**My Explanation:** The devil in his temptations does not attack us where we are strong but instead he attacks us and tempts us at our weakest point as a good military leader would. It is therefore important for us to be honest with ourselves and take a personal invitational (examination of conscience) to see where we are weak (where we are constantly giving into the devil's temptations). We should then work to strengthen those areas of our life but also being aware at this time that the devil will then begin looking for our next weakest spot.

**Reflection:** St. Ignatius in his last rule in this series reminds us that the devil is in this for the long haul and that the devil will not attack us where we are strong but rather where we are weakest. If therefore I am a very humble person the devil may attack me with temptations of avarice and greed. The point is that no matter how holy I am and how much good I am doing, I have a spiritual enemy that is seeking out my weakest point to tempt me away from God. It is therefore important to take my spiritual life seriously and to do a daily examination of conscience.

**Summarize:** Rules 13 and 14 show us the importance of being radically honest with ourselves and with God in regard to our spiritual lives. The devil's best weapon it seems is dishonesty. When we dismiss our sins lightly or do not invite God in to heal our wounds we create opening for the devil to tempt us away from God.

