

FIRST WEEK RULES

THE TEXT OF THE RULES

Rules for becoming aware and understanding to some extent the different movements which are caused in the soul, the good, to receive them, and the bad to reject them. And these rules are more proper for the first week.

First Rule. The first rule: in persons who are going from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures to them, leading them to 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 a contrary method, stinging and biting their consciences through their rational power of moral judgment.

Second rule. The second: in persons who are going on intensely purifying their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord, the method is contrary to that in the first rule. For then it is proper to the evil spirit to bite, sadden, and place obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, so that the person may not go forward. And it is proper to the good spirit to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing and taking away all obstacles, so that the person may go forward in doing good.

Third Rule. The third is of spiritual consolation. I call it consolation when some interior movement is caused in the soul, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and, consequently when it can love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but only 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 ordered to his service and praise. Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy that 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.

Fourth Rule. The fourth is of spiritual desolation. I call desolation all the contrary of the third rule, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to low and earthly things, disquiet from various agitations and temptations, moving to lack of confidence, without hope, without love, finding oneself totally slothful, tepid, sad and, as if separated from one's Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts that come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts that come from desolation.

Fifth Rule. The fifth: in time of desolation never make a change but be firm and constant in the proposals and determination in which one was the day preceding such desolation, or in the determination in which one was in the preceding consolation. Because, as in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us more, so in desolation the bad spirit, with whose counsels we cannot find the way to a right decision.

Sixth rule. The sixth: although in desolation we should not change our first proposals, it is very advantageous to change ourselves intensely against the desolation itself, as by insisting more upon prayer, meditation, upon much examination, and upon extending ourselves in some suitable way of doing penance.

Seventh Rule. The seventh: let one who is in desolation consider how the Lord has left him in trial in his natural powers, so that he may resist the various agitations and temptations of the enemy; since he can resist with the divine help, which always remains with him, though he does not clearly feel it; for the Lord has taken away from him his great fervor, abundant love and intense grace, leaving him, however, sufficient grace for eternal salvation.

Eighth rule. The eighth: let one who is in desolation work to be in patience, which is contrary to the vexations which come to him, and let him think that he will soon be consoled, diligently using the means against such desolation, as is said in the sixth rule.

Ninth rule. The ninth: there are three principal causes for which we find ourselves desolate. The first is because we are tepid, slothful 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 extend ourselves in his service and praise without so much payment of consolations and increased graces. The third, to give us true recognition and understanding so that we may interiorly feel that it is not ours to attain or maintain increased devotion, intense love, tears or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is the gift and grace of God our Lord, and so that we may not build a nest in something belonging to another, raising our mind in some pride or vainglory, attributing to ourselves the devotion or the other parts of the spiritual consolation.

Tenth rule. The tenth: 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.

Eleventh Rule. The eleventh: 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.

Twelfth Rule. The twelfth: the enemy acts like a woman in being weak when faced with strength and strong when faced with weakness. For, as it is proper to a woman, when she is fighting with some man, to lose heart and to flee when the man confronts her firmly, and, on the contrary, if the man begins to flee, losing heart, the anger, vengeance and ferocity of the woman grow greatly and know no bounds, in the same way, it is proper to the enemy to weaken and lose heart, fleeing and ceasing his temptations when the person who is exercising himself in spiritual things confronts the temptations of the enemy firmly, doing what is diametrically opposed to them; and, on the contrary, if the person who is exercising himself begins to be afraid and lose heart in suffering the temptations, there is no beast so fierce on the face of the earth as the enemy of human nature in following out his damnable intention with such growing malice.

Thirteenth Rule. The thirteenth: likewise he conducts himself as a false lover in wishing to remain secret and not be revealed. For a dissolute man who, speaking with evil intention, makes dishonorable advances to a daughter of a good father or a wife of a good husband, wishes his words and persuasions to be secret, and the contrary displeases him very much, when the daughter reveals to her father or the wife to her husband his false words and depraved intention, because he easily perceives 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 wishes and desires that they be received and kept in secret; but when one reveals them to one's good confessor or to another spiritual person, who knows his deceits and malicious designs, it weighs on him very much, because he perceives that he will not be able to succeed with the malicious undertaking he has begun, since his manifest deceits have been revealed.

Fourteenth Rule. The fourteenth: likewise, he conducts himself as a leader, intent upon conquering and robbing what he desires. For, just as a captain and leader of an army in the field, pitching his camp and exploring the fortifications and defenses of a stronghold, attacks it at the weakest point, in the same way the enemy of human nature, roving about, looks in turn at all our theological, cardinal and moral virtues; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and attempts to take us.

FIRST WEEK RULES

EXAMPLES

St. Ignatius: “As he read them over many times, he became rather fond of what he found written there. Putting his reading aside, he sometimes stopped to think about the things he had read and at other times about the things of the world that he used to think about before. Of the many vain things that presented themselves to him, one took such a hold on his heart that he was absorbed in thinking about it for two or three or four hours without realizing it: he imagined what he would do in the service of a certain lady, the means he would take so he could go to the country where she lived, the verses, the words he would say to her, the deeds of arms he would do in her service. He became so conceited with this that he did not consider how impossible it would be because the lady was not of the lower nobility nor a countess nor a duchess, but her station was higher than any of these.

Nevertheless, Our Lord assisted him, causing other thoughts that arose from the things he read to follow these. While reading the life of Our Lord and of the saints, he stopped to think, reasoning within himself: “What if I should do what St. Francis did, what St. Dominic did?” So he pondered over many things that he found to be good, always proposing to himself what was difficult and serious, and as he proposed them, they seemed to him easy to accomplish. But his every thought was to say to himself, “St. Dominic did this, therefore, I have to do it. St. Francis did this, therefore, I have to do it.” These thoughts also lasted a good while, but when other matters intervened, the worldly thoughts mentioned above returned, and he also spent much time on them.

This succession of such diverse thoughts lasted for a long time and he always dwelt at length on the thought before him, either of the worldly deeds he wished to achieve or of the deeds of God that came to his imagination, until he tired of it and put it aside and turned to other matters.

Yet there was this difference. When he was thinking about the things of the world, he took much delight in them, but afterwards, when he was tired and put them aside, he found that he was dry and discontented. But when he thought of going to Jerusalem, barefoot and eating nothing but herbs and undergoing all the other rigors that he saw the saints had endured, not only was he consoled when he had these thoughts, but even after putting them aside, he remained content and happy.

He did not notice this, however, nor did he stop to ponder the difference until one time his eyes were opened a little, and he began to marvel at the difference and to reflect upon it, realizing from experience that some thoughts left him sad and others happy. Little by little he came to recognize the difference between the spirits that agitated him, one from the demon, the other from God.”

Rule 1

St. Augustine: “In my youth I burned to fill myself with evil things... I dared to run wild in different and dark ways of passion.”

This was the nature of my sickness. I was in torment, reproaching myself more bitterly than ever as I twisted and turned in my chain. I hoped that my chain might be broken once and for all, because it was only a small thing that held me now... And you, O Lord, never ceased to watch over my secret heart. In your stern mercy you lashed me with the twin scourge of fear and shame in case I should give way once more and the worn and slender remnant of my chain should not be broken but gain new strength and bind me all the faster. In my heart I kept saying ‘Let it be now, let it be now!’, and merely by saying this I was on the point of making the resolution. I was on the point of making it, but I did not succeed.

I stood on the brink of resolution... I tried again and came a little nearer to my goal, and then a little nearer still, so that I could almost reach out and grasp it. But I did not reach it...

I was held back by mere trifles, the most paltry inanities, all my old attachments. They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, ‘Are you going to dismiss us? From this moment we shall never be with you again, forever and ever. From this moment you will never be allowed to do this thing or that, for evermore... These voices... no longer barred my way, blatantly contradictory, but their mutterings seemed to reach me from behind, as though they were stealthily plucking at my back, trying to make me turn my head when I wanted to go forward. Yet in my state of indecision, they kept me from tearing myself away, from shaking myself free of them and leaping across the barrier to the other side, where you were calling me.

But by now... I had turned my eyes elsewhere, and while I stood trembling at the barrier, on the other side I could see the chaste beauty of Continence in all her serene, unsullied joy, as she modestly beckoned me to cross over and to hesitate no more. She stretched out loving hands to welcome and embrace me, holding up a host of good examples to my sight. With her were countless boys and girls, great numbers of the young and people of all ages... And in their midst was Continence herself, not barren but a fruitful mother of children, of joys born of you, O Lord, her Spouse. She smiled at me to give me courage, as though she were saying, ‘Can you not do what these men and women do? Do you think they find the strength to do it in themselves and not in the Lord their God? ... Why do you try to stand in your own strength and fail? Cast yourself upon God and have no fear. He will not shrink away and let you fall. Cast yourself upon him without fear, for he will welcome you and cure you of your ills.”

Rule 2

St. Ignatius to Sr. Teresa Rejadell: “The enemy is leading you into error... but not in any way to make you fall into a sin that would separate you from God our Lord. He tries rather to upset you and to interfere with your service of God and your peace of mind.”

“We find ourselves sad without knowing why. We cannot pray with devotion, nor contemplate, nor even speak or hear of the things of God with any interior taste or relish.”

“The enemy as a rule follows this course. He places obstacles and impediments in the way of those who love and begin to serve God our Lord, and this is the first weapon he uses in his efforts to wound them. He asks, for instance: “How can you continue a life of such great penance, deprived of all satisfaction from friends, relatives, possessions? How can you lead so lonely a life, with no rest, when you can save your soul in other ways and without such dangers?” He tries to bring us to understand that we must lead a life that is longer than it will actually be, by reason of the trials he places before us and which no one ever underwent.”

Lucia: “That experience I had as I was leaving after my retreat a month ago made quite an impression on me. It certainly took me by surprise! My mind was in such confusion that I couldn’t comprehend what was happening to me. I didn’t understand how I could feel so bad so fast after feeling so good for so long. On my way home I was second-guessing my entire retreat and felt that due to my failure it had been a complete waste of time. I figured that I must have some serious problem and that maybe I had been dishonest by not bringing it up during the retreat. And since I didn’t even know what the “problem” was, I concluded that I was probably incapable of making a “good” retreat because I was incapable of being honest and open. The thought came to me that I should not waste your time and mine with these retreats. When I thought of calling you about it, I ran into still more obstacles. I felt that I really had no right to bother you – after all, my retreat was over. If things weren’t resolved during the retreat, that was my own fault.”

Rule 3

Raissa Maritain: “At the first invocation, *Kyrie eleison*, obliged to absorb myself, my mind arrested on the Person of the Father. Impossible to change the object. Sweetness, attraction, eternal youth of the heavenly Father. Suddenly, keen sense of his nearness, of his tenderness, of his incomprehensible love which impels him to demand our love, our thought. Greatly moved, I wept very sweet tears... Joy of being able to call him Father with a great tenderness, to feel him so kind and so close to me.”

St. Thérèse: “Descending the steps leading into the garden, she saw a little white hen under a tree, protecting her little chicks under her wings; some were peeping out from under. Thérèse stopped, looking at them thoughtfully; after a while, I made a sign that we should go inside. I noticed her eyes were filled with tears, and I said: “You’re crying!” She put her hand over her eyes and cried even more.

“I can’t explain it just now; I’m too deeply touched.”

That evening, in her cell, she told me the following, and there was a heavenly expression on her face:

“I cried when I thought how God used this image in order to teach us his tenderness toward us. All through my life, this is what he has done for me! He has hidden me totally under his wings! Earlier in the day, when I was leaving you, I was crying when going upstairs; I was unable to control myself any longer, and I hastened to our cell. My heart was overflowing with love and gratitude.”

Rule 4

Alice is a dedicated woman of faith, active for years in her parish. Sharing the life of the parish is a source of spiritual strength for her and brings her joy in the Lord. More recently she has moved to a new town and joined the local parish. Here too Alice has sought involvement in the parish community but in her new setting has found this more difficult. A year passes amid struggles and she begins to question the value of her efforts.

Alice sees herself as a pretty complete failure and feels altogether discouraged.... Recently, even in her own personal prayer, she has experienced feelings of emptiness, of being abandoned by God. She feels that God is no longer near and she becomes overwhelmed with frustration. She wonders if she isn't altogether losing her faith in God's loving care. She does continue to be faithful to community worship and to her personal times for prayer, but it all seems hopeless and meaningless.

St. Ignatius to Sr. Teresa Rejadell: “I will call your attention briefly to two lessons which our Lord usually gives, or permits. The one of them he gives, the other he permits. The first is an interior consolation which casts out all uneasiness and draws one to a complete love of our Lord.... In a word, when this divine consolation is present all trials are pleasant and all weariness rest. He who goes forward with this fervor, warmth, and interior consolation finds every burden light and sweetness in every penance or trial, however great. This consolation points out and opens the way we are to follow and points out the way we are to avoid. It does not remain with us always, but it will always accompany us on the way at the times that God designates. All this is for our progress.

But when this consolation is absent the other lesson comes to light. Our ancient enemy sets up all possible obstacles to turn us aside from the way on which we have entered. He makes use of everything to vex us, and everything in the first lesson is reversed. We find ourselves sad without knowing why. We cannot pray with devotion, nor contemplate, nor even speak or hear of the things of God with any interior taste or relish. Not only this, but if he sees that we are weak and much humbled by these harmful thoughts, he goes on to suggest that we are entirely forgotten by God our Lord, and leads us to think that we are quite separated from him and that all that we have done and all that we desire to do is entirely worthless. He thus endeavors to bring us to a state of general discouragement.... For this reason is it necessary for us to be aware of our opponent.”

Rule 5

St. Ignatius: “In the customary prayer I felt great devotion and from midway on there was much of it, clear, lucid and as it were warm. Once in the chapel, as I saw some going down the stairway in a hurry and at a great pace, I did not feel ready to celebrate the mass and I returned to my room to prepare myself. Composing myself with tears, I returned to the chapel. During a part of the mass I felt great devotion, sometimes with movements to tears. During the other part I struggled many times with what I would do to finish, because I was not finding what I was seeking.... When the mass was finished, and afterward in my room, I found myself totally alone and without help of any kind, without power to relish any of my mediators or any of the Divine Persons, but so remote and so separated from them, as if I had never felt anything of them, or never would feel anything again. Rather, thoughts came to me sometimes against Jesus, sometimes against another Person, being so confused with different thoughts, such as to leave the house and rent a room so as to avoid the noise, or to attempt a fast, or to begin the masses over again, or to put the altar on a higher floor. In nothing could I find peace since I desired to finish at a time when my soul was in consolation and completely at rest.”

Rule 6

Ray has long placed faith at the center of his life and in recent years, especially, has grown closer to the Lord. He rejoices in seeing that, as a result of this spiritual growth, his love for his wife and children has deepened and their family bond is now stronger. Each day as he rides the commuter train to work he dedicates a few minutes to reading from Scripture. Today on his way to work he finds himself distracted and unable to read with attention or to reflect fruitfully. He arrives at work and the busyness of the morning envelopes him, but he is also vaguely conscious of a certain interior malaise. While his fellow workers have no direct awareness of his deepening faith in the Lord, they have noticed a change in Ray recently and appreciate his ready smile and willingness to help; today, however, he struggles even to be patient with them and only wishes the working hours to end.

The lunch hour arrives. As the hour begins Ray normally takes a few minutes, alone in his office, to lift his heart to God in prayer. Today he feels no desire to pray and does not; instead he finds himself considering taking his meal in a place nearby where he knows the surroundings and the conversation are not conducive to his life of faith. Ray is on the point of leaving the office with this intention when suddenly he stops. He is aware that his heart is troubled; his distracted prayer on the train, his lack of willingness to assist his companions in the office, his omission of habitual prayer as his lunch hour began, and now his readiness to follow what he knows is a temptation with potentially harmful consequences – all of these signal that something is spiritually amiss. Ray senses that he must address this.

He sits down at his desk in the silence of his office and asks the Lord’s help to understand what is occurring within him. He remembers how only the day before he was happy and energetic in his service of the Lord, of the others at work, and of his family. As he reflects, he is able to pinpoint the moment the change took place. Before leaving home this morning, preoccupied with his preparations for work, he unthinkingly brushed aside a request for attention from his little son. His wife was present and Ray saw the hurt in her eyes, mirroring the hurt in those of

his son. Rushed and impatient, he responded to neither and left for work. Ray perceives that this was the moment when he lost his peace; this was the origin of the malaise he has felt since and which has burdened everything thus far in the day: prayer, relationships at work, even his present decision regarding where he will take lunch.

This new sense of clarity lightens his heart and he grasps clearly what he must do. He calls his wife and expresses his sorrow for his impatience that morning and for the hurt he caused her and his son. Her joy in their conversation lifts his heart further. He prays as usual in his office. He rejects the thought of taking lunch in the inappropriate place and eats with his office companions as usual. Now he finds that his smile again comes easily and that his habitual willingness to assist the others has returned.

- “myself-in-desolation”
- “myself-reflecting-on-myself-in-desolation”

Spiritual Exercises, no. 13: “We must remember that during the time of consolation it is easy, and requires only a slight effort, to continue a whole hour in contemplation, but in time of desolation it is very difficult to do so. Hence, in order to fight against the desolation and conquer the temptation, the exercitant must always remain in the exercise a little more than the full hour. Thus he will accustom himself not only to resist the enemy, but even to overthrow him.”

Rule 7

Saint Angela of Foligno: “During this period I was in a state of great stress, for it seemed to me that I felt nothing of God, and I also had the impression that I was abandoned by him; nor was I able to confess my sins.... Nor could I even praise God or remain in prayer. It seemed to me that all that was left of God in me was the conviction that I had not suffered as many trials as I deserved and, similarly, that I did not want to fall away from his grace by sinning for all the good or evil or sufferings that the world has to offer, nor did I want to assent to any evil. I was in this intense and terrible state of torment for more than four weeks.”

Rule 8

Servant of God Elizabeth Leseur: “Cowardice, weakness, awkwardness in my demeanor with others – things that can harm the ideas I cherish; acute physical suffering and deep moral suffering; in the midst of this a will unshakably turned to God, a plenitude of confidence in him and love for him; daily duties performed at whatever cost by great effort, without fervor, but still performed; then, little by little, calm returning to me, and divine strength penetrating me again; new and energetic resolutions, the hope that God will help me to do my duty, all my duty – that is the tale of these last weeks and of my soul during this time.”

“More than two months in the dejection of almost continual physical suffering, and with terrible anxiety on Juliette’s account; the miserable belief that my illness will last as long as I do, always impeding my life. Complete resignation, but without joy or any inner consolation. The resolve to use my misfortunes for the good of souls. To fill my life with prayer, work and charity. To

maintain serenity through everything. To love more than ever those who are the dear companions of my life.”

Thomas Green, S.J.: “Desolations will come; they are, in fact, as normal a part of human life as are rainy days.”

Julian of Norwich: “And after this he revealed a supreme spiritual delight in my soul. In this delight I was filled full of everlasting surety, powerfully secured without any painful fear. This sensation was so welcome and so spiritual that I was wholly at peace, at ease and at rest, so that there was nothing upon earth which could have afflicted me. This lasted only for a time, and then I was changed, and abandoned to myself, oppressed and weary of my life and ruining myself, so that I hardly had the patience to go on living. I felt that there was no ease or comfort for me except faith, hope and love, and truly I felt very little of this. And then presently God gave me again comfort and rest for my soul, delight and security so blessedly and so powerfully that there was no fear, no sorrow, no pain, physical or spiritual, that one could suffer which might have disturbed me. And then again I felt the pain, and then afterwards the delight and the joy, now the one and now the other, again and again, I suppose about twenty times. And in the time of joy I could have said with St. Paul: Nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ; and in the pain I could have said with St. Peter: Lord, save me, I am perishing. This vision was shown to teach me to understand that some souls profit by experiencing this, to be comforted at one time, and at another to fail and to be left to themselves. God wishes us to know that he keeps us safe all the time, in sorrow and in joy.”

Rule 9

God’s Reason

Fruit

1. Our Faults

Conversion

2. A Trial

Learning

3. Consolation is Gift

Humility

St. Ignatius: “Later, at another time, when much consoled, I thought that I was satisfied, that is, I thought that it was better not to be consoled by God our Lord, if the lack of his visitation was due to my not having disposed myself or helped myself throughout the day, or in giving place to some thoughts that distracted me from his words in the sacrifice [the Mass] and from his divine majesty, and so I thought it would be better not to be consoled in the time of my faults, and that God our Lord orders this (who loves me more than I love myself), for my greater spiritual benefit, so that it is better for me to walk straight, not only in the sacrifice, but throughout the day, in order to be visited.”

Lucia (see rule 2 above): “So it was truly the grace of God that prompted me to make that phone call, and your words and prayers revealed the truth to me. I realize now more than ever how much God loves me, how much I need him; and I am more determined than ever to “keep my eyes fixed on Jesus,” to follow him, to serve him, to do his will.”

A brother, to St. Francis of Assisi: “Pray for me, kind Father, for I am sure that I will be immediately freed from my temptations if you will be kind enough to pray for me. For I am afflicted above my strength and I know that this is no secret to you. St. Francis said to him: “Believe me, son, I think you are for that reason more truly a servant of God; and know that the more you are tempted, the more will you be loved by me.” And he added: “I tell you in all truth, no one must consider himself a servant of God until he has undergone temptations and tribulations. Temptation overcome,” he said, “is in a way a ring with which the Lord espouses the soul of his servant to himself.”

Rule 10

St. Elizabeth Seton: “In the year 1789, when my father was in England, one morning in May, in the lightness of a cheerful heart, I jumped in the wagon that was driving to the woods for brush, about a mile from home; the boy who drove it began to cut, and I set off in the woods, soon found an outlet in a meadow; and a chestnut tree with several young ones growing around it, found rich moss under it and a warm sun. Here, then, was a sweet bed – the air a clear blue vault above – the numberless sounds of spring melody and joy – the sweet clovers and wild flowers I had got by the way, and a heart as innocent as human heart could be, filled even with enthusiastic love to God and admiration of His works...

God was my Father, my all. I prayed, sang hymns, cried, laughed, talking to myself of how far He could place me above all sorrow. Then I laid still to enjoy the heavenly peace that came over my soul; and I am sure, in the two hours so enjoyed, grew ten years in the spiritual life...”

St. Bonaventure, of St Francis of Assisi: “Francis would never let any call of the Spirit go unanswered; when he experienced it, he would make the most of it and enjoy the consolation afforded him in this way for as long as God permitted it. If he was on a journey, and felt the near approach of God’s Spirit, he would stop and let his companions go on, while he drank in the joy of this new inspiration; he refused to offer God’s grace an ineffectual welcome (cf. 2Cor 6:1).”

Blessed Mary of the Incarnation (Carmelite, +1618): “It happened one day that a young religious who had not yet been professed three years, told her that she did not desire any consolation in her devotions, but rather to walk amidst thorns and desolations, because this was the royal way, divine and highly meritorious. Blessed Mary rebuked her, made her realize her weakness which was not able to bear up under such privations, and showed her that it is good to have consolations and sensible fervors in order to make us seek God with greater ardor.”

Ways of “taking new strength:”

1. Prayer of petition for strength in future spiritual desolation
2. Meditation on truths that will sustain in spiritual desolation
3. Consideration of the value of spiritual desolation for growth
4. Reflection on past personal growth through spiritual desolation
5. Resolution to make no changes in time of spiritual desolation
6. Review of these Ignatian rules
7. Planning for specific situations of spiritual desolation

Rule 11

Jane. Day 1: Jane begins the retreat in peace, with a quiet expectation of meeting Christ. She reflects, as directed, on chapter 55 of Isaiah and is attracted to verse 1: “All you who are thirsty, come to the water!” and verse 12: “Yes, in joy you shall depart, in peace you shall be brought back.” She is confident that the Lord will nourish and refresh her for her ministry.

Day 2: In praying over the assigned Scripture verse, “Come to me... I will refresh you” (Matt. 11:28), Jane experiences an inner cleansing and refreshment as if she were drawn into a fountain of fire and water. She is filled with wonder and joy. The blissful feeling remains with her throughout the day, and she experiences the nearness of Jesus as she ponders other assigned Scripture readings and listens to what the Lord is saying to her.

Day 3: She arises early next morning quietly hoping for similar experiences of the Lord. She prays over the assigned section of the Canticum of Canticles and experiences a sweet joy at the thought of the Lord’s love for her. She then decides to prolong her praying periods from an hour to an hour and a half each so as to become more immersed in Christ. She does not inform her director about this plan. She spends seven hours that day in prayer. Her excitement grows. That night she cannot fall asleep.

Day 4: Jane gets up with a bad headache, feeling exhausted and under strain. She cannot pray well. All joy has evaporated. She is tired and sad and moody. Finally in the evening she tells the director about her action of the previous day and its results. The director advises cutting down on prayer time and resting more.

Day 5: She follows the advice, prays less but still has no enthusiasm and is filled with gloom.

Day 6: At her morning prayer she becomes very much disturbed. She begins to doubt the Lord’s presence to her even in the opening days of the retreat. Probably, she thinks, she should attribute everything to her overactive imagination. Who is she to be given a taste of the sweetness of the Lord? She begins to grow discouraged at the thought that she is not meant for a deep prayer life. Her desire for God is just an illusion. The rest of the day is one of disquietude, confusion, and a sense of discouragement.

Day 7: The director urges her to trust her earlier experiences and to hope in the Lord that he will bring good even from this desolation. She directs her to pray over John 14, especially the opening verses, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” She prays quietly over the passages, rests more, takes walks in the garden.

Day 8: On the closing day she returns to chapter 55 of Isaiah: “Come to the water... in joy you shall depart.” A calm settles on her mind and spirit. She knows that she is loved by God. She also knows at her deepest level that the experience of the second day was genuine. She has become more aware of her weaknesses, especially her undisciplined imagination and her rapidly fluctuating emotions. She prays for light and strength to manage these and become more balanced emotionally. She ends the retreat in quiet gratitude. She looks forward now in hope to her ministry – a more wise and serene woman.

Rule 12

Steve has completed seven years of seminary training and is on the verge of ordination to the diaconate, as a preparation for priesthood. He has reached, therefore, the moment of definitive decision for the clerical state of life. His preparation for ordination includes an eight-day Ignatian retreat, to be made a few weeks before the ceremony. Steve welcomes the opportunity to pray more deeply as he approaches this key moment in his life and willingly prepares for these days of silence and recollection. Steve is an occasional smoker and, before the retreat, decides to abstain from smoking during the eight days of retreat.

The retreat begins and Steve dedicates himself to the daily rhythm of liturgical prayer with the other seminarians, personal prayer with Scripture, and his personal meeting with the director. He finds the silence helpful and enjoys the setting of natural beauty that surrounds the retreat house. He experiences warm times of closeness to God in prayer and a sense of God’s presence in the retreat.

After supper on the fourth day, Steve finds that he has lost his former sense of peace. He goes for a walk, but a vague interior disquiet persists. Steve decides to smoke a single cigarette and does so. He then goes to his room for his final hour of prayer that evening, unhappy that he has not maintained his resolve to avoid smoking during the retreat. As he begins his prayer, he continues to feel restless and ill at ease.

The prayer is distracted and dry, and Steve, finding it difficult, ends the prayer period after forty-five minutes. He awakens late the next morning and barely arrives in time for Morning Prayer with the other seminarians. He continues with the times of prayer as planned, but finds them empty and burdensome. God seems far away, and Steve becomes increasingly frustrated as he strives to pray. A thought comes to him: “You are about to be ordained a deacon, and you wish to become a priest. Look at you! You can’t even keep a simple resolution not to smoke for eight days. You can’t complete an hour of prayer as planned. You are unable to pray with any fruit at all, after all these years of training. If you can’t even do these simple things, how are you ever going to handle the responsibilities of priesthood for the rest of your life?”

In the early afternoon, Steve meets as usual with the retreat director and shares openly with the director all that he has experienced since the day before. The sharing relieves his frustration and doubts, and the director helps Steve to discern the spiritual movements at work in him. Steve recovers his peace, continues his retreat with his habitual good will, and, a few weeks later, is ordained a deacon. His ordination is the beginning of a rewarding year of diaconate and leads, later, to a fruitful priesthood.

St. Francis of Assisi: “The saint, therefore, made it a point to keep himself in joy of heart and to preserve the unction of the Spirit and the “oil of gladness” [Ps 45:7]. He avoided with the greatest care the miserable illness of dejection, so that if he felt it creeping over his mind even a little, he would have recourse very quickly to prayer. For he would say: “If the servant of God, as may happen, is disturbed in any way, he should rise immediately to pray and he should remain in the presence of the heavenly Father until he “restores unto him the joy of salvation” [Ps 51:12].”

Rule 13

St. Thérèse: “The beautiful day of my wedding [final vows] finally arrived. It was without a single cloud; however, the preceding evening a storm arose in my soul, the like of which I’d never seen before.

Not a single doubt concerning my vocation had ever entered my mind until then, and it evidently was necessary that I experience this trial. In the evening, while making the Way of the Cross after Matins, my vocation appeared to me as a dream, a chimera. I found life in Carmel to be very beautiful, but the devil inspired me with the assurance that it wasn’t for me and that I was misleading my Superiors by advancing on this way to which I wasn’t called. The darkness was so great that I could understand one thing only: I didn’t have a vocation. Ah! how can I possibly describe the anguish in my soul?

It appeared to me (and this is an absurdity which shows it was a temptation from the devil) that if I were to tell my Novice Mistress about these fears, she would prevent me from pronouncing my Vows. And still I wanted to do God’s will and return to the world rather than remain in Carmel and do my own will.

I made the Novice Mistress come out of the choir and, filled with confusion, I told her the state of my soul. Fortunately, she saw things much clearer than I did, and she completely reassured me. The act of humility I had just performed put the devil to flight since he had perhaps thought that I would not dare admit my temptation. My doubts left me completely as soon as I finished speaking.

My doubts left me completely as soon as I finished speaking; nevertheless, to make my act of humility even more perfect, I still wished to confide my strange temptation to our Mother Prioress, who simply laughed at me.

In the morning of September 8, I felt as though I were flooded with a river of peace, and it was in this peace “which surpasses all understanding” [Phil 4:7] that I pronounced my Holy Vows.”

Thomas Merton: “The fight went on in my mind.

By now, the problem had resolved itself into one practical issue: why don't I consult somebody about the whole question?

More practical still, here at St. Bonaventure's there was one priest whom I had come to know well during this last year, a wise and good philosopher, Father Philotheus.... I knew I could trust him with the most involved spiritual problem. Why did I not ask him?

There was one absurd, crazy thing that held me up: it was a kind of blind impulse, confused, obscure, irrational.... it amounted to a vague subconscious fear that I would once and for all be told that I definitely had no vocation. It was the fear of an ultimate refusal.

Finally, on the Thursday of that week, in the evening, I suddenly found myself filled with a vivid conviction: "The time has come for me to go and be a Trappist...."

And yet, in the way, stood hesitation: that old business. But now there could be no delaying. I must finish with that, once and for all, and get an answer. I must talk to somebody who would settle it. It could be done in five minutes. And now was the time. Now.

Whom should I ask? Father Philotheus was probably in his room downstairs. I went downstairs, and out into the court. Yes, there was a light in Father Philotheus' room. All right. Go in and see what he has to say.

But instead of that, I bolted out into the darkness and made for the grove....

In the silence of the grove my feet were loud on the gravel. I walked and prayed. It was very, very dark by the shrine of the Little Flower. "For Heaven's sake, help me!" I said.

I started back toward the buildings. "All right. Now I am really going to go in there and ask him. Here's the situation, Father. What do you think? Should I go and be a Trappist?"

There was still a light in Father Philotheus' room. I walked bravely into the hall, but when I got within about six feet of his door it was almost as if someone had stopped me and held me where I was with physical hands. Something jammed in my will. I couldn't walk a step further, even though I wanted to. I made a kind of push at the obstacle... and then turned around and ran out of the place once more.

Again I headed for the grove.... My feet were loud on the gravel. I was in the silence of the grove, among wet trees.

I don't think there was ever a moment in my life when my soul felt so urgent and so special an anguish.

[After intense prayer, alone in the darkness of the evening, Merton gains the courage to return to buildings, "going the long way 'round, past the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes and the far end of the football field," and is ready to try yet again.]

When I came into the courtyard, I saw that the light in Father Philotheus' room was out.... My heart sank.

Yet there was one hope. I went right on through the door and into the corridor, and turned to the Friar's common room. I had never even gone near that door before. I had never dared. But now I went up and knocked on the glass panel and opened the door and looked inside.

There was nobody there except one Friar alone, Father Philotheus.

I asked if I could speak with him and we went to his room.

That was the end of all my anxiety, all my hesitation.

As soon as I proposed all my hesitations and questions to him, Father Philotheus said that he could see no reason why I shouldn't want to enter a monastery and become a priest.

It may seem irrational, but at that moment, it was as if scales fell off my own eyes, and looking back on all my worries and questions, I could see clearly how empty and futile they had been.... Accident and circumstances had all contributed to exaggerate and distort things in my mind. But now everything was straight again. And already I was full of peace and assurance – the consciousness that everything was right, and that a straight road had opened out, clear and smooth, ahead of me....

I went upstairs like somebody who had been called back from the dead. Never had I experienced the calm, untroubled peace and certainty that filled my heart.”

Rule 14

Is there some situation that frequently discourages me? That frequently strips me of spiritual energy?

Are there circumstances in which I often become afraid?

In which I often become worn out?

In which I feel spiritually helpless?

Is there one recurring way in which I find myself spiritually weakened?

Does one thing seem to diminish most my energy to love and serve others?

Is there something that habitually disheartens me in prayer?

That causes me to doubt God's love for me?

Is there a *repeating pattern* of these experiences?

Conclusion

St. Pierre Favre: “May it please the divine clemency to give me the grace of clearly remembering and pondering the benefits which the Lord conferred on me in those days through that man. Firstly, he gave me an understanding of my conscience and of the temptations and scruples I had had for so long without either understanding them or seeing the way by which I would be able to get peace.”

Resources

Books

Father Gallagher has two full-length books on these rules. The first is more systematic. The second explores additional aspects of the rules and is also more personal. Either book may be read first. The other, if read, will reinforce and complete the teaching.

The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide to Everyday Living (New York: Crossroad, 2005)

Setting Captives Free: Personal Reflections on Ignatian Discernment of Spirits (New York: Crossroad, 2018)

A reader's guide for individual or group study accompanies the first book:

A Reader's Guide to The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide to Everyday Living (New York: Crossroad, 2013)

Podcasts

These are fifteen half-hour conversations in which Father Gallagher discusses the rules. The podcasts are free and accessible in the following places:

www.discerninghearts.com

Discerning Hearts App

YouTube

iTunes

Google Play

FORMED

DVD

This same material is presented as a televised series in ten forty-five-minute episodes. The DVD is titled *Living the Discerning Life* and is available through the EWTN catalogue and Father Gallagher's website: www.frtimothygallagher.org