

Rule 12

Standing Firm in the Beginning

We continue with our summer series on St. Ignatius' *Rules for Discernment*. All of these columns are posted on our parish website under "Welcome; St. Ignatius."

Rules 3-11 focused on spiritual consolation and desolation. In Rules 12-14, the final three rules, Ignatius focuses his attention on helping us combat and resist the enemy. In Rule 12, Ignatius speaks of the enemy's *temptations*; in Rule 13 of the enemy's *deceits*; and Rule 14 of the enemy's *attacks*. Let us look at Rule 12.

Twelfth Rule: *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.

Obviously, a word is in order about Ignatius's analogy in our sensitive age. We have an unnatural situation wherein a man and woman are fighting. It was never in God's original plan for a man and woman to battle each other, but rather to share their lives together and serve each other. The analogy, then, is meant to highlight how the enemy tries to distort and twist God's plan wherein we participate in His life and love.

One commentator on this rule substitutes the metaphor of a "spoiled child." If a person remains firm with a spoiled child right away, the child will eventually give up his or her way of acting. If, however, the person loses heart and begins to give in, the child's tantrum grows fiercer and has no limits.

The key is that the enemy remains *weak* when faced with strength, and *strong* when faced with weakness. When the enemy sees weakness, like a spoiled child, he begins to *lose heart* and *flee* when confronted with strength. In other words, in reality the enemy is *essentially weak*. If

resisted, he flees. St. James wisely said, "*So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" (Jam. 4:7)

Unfortunately, when you become afraid, begin to lose heart and open yourself to temptation, the enemy becomes *strong* and his intensity toward you *grows*. In other words, temptation has a "snowball effect" in that if not resisted right away, it gains momentum and becomes more difficult to resist.

The crucial moment, then, is to resist the enemy's temptation when it *first begins*. The success or failure of resisting temptation largely rests when first encountered. Firmly resist the enemy's temptation quickly, and he will flee. You will have won the battle. Entertain the enemy's temptation and he will become stronger causing you to become entangled in a difficult battle.

Practically: There is tremendous wisdom in this rule. For example, a man struggles with lust and maintaining purity. One night, after a long day of work, he is tempted to watch impure movies or videos. It is critical that the moment the temptation comes, he *resists it firmly*. He can make an act of the will by saying, "No, I do not want this" and ask for divine assistance, "Jesus, please help me. Blessed Mother, pray for me. I need you." If he does not do this, the temptation will become stronger and he is much more likely to fall.

Additionally, a woman struggles with gossip and the sin of detraction (i.e., harming others' reputations). She is conversing with a family member. She senses the conversation going in a direction wherein she is greatly tempted to speak poorly about someone. At that moment, she makes an act of the will saying, "I will not speak bad about this person" and asks for divine help, "Jesus, help me to be silent or say something positive." In short, Rule 12 reminds us how important it is to know our weaknesses and take action quickly to resist the enemy's workings.



Goldy: "Jesus, help me resist the temptation to eat this bone."