

Rule 14 *Strengthening the Weak Point*

We have come to the end of our summer series on St. Ignatius' *Rules for Discernment*.

In Rules 12-14, the final three rules, we have been looking at how to combat and resist the enemy. Rule 12 teaches us to resist temptation right away. Rule 13 reminds us that when we bring things to light, the enemy loses his power. Let us now look at Rule 14.

Fourteenth Rule: *Likewise [the enemy] 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.*

In preparing for battle, good leaders get a lay of the land and discern the weak points of their enemies. They know that the fortifications and armies of their enemies are only as strong as their weakest points. After examining every point, leaders attack appropriately.

In a similar way, the enemy examines our theological, cardinal, and moral virtues. Virtues are habitual dispositions to do good. For example, generosity is the habitual disposition of giving gifts. A generous person gives regularly because he or she is unattached to material goods.

Virtues are divided into categories. Theological virtues relate directly to God. There are three: faith, hope and charity. Cardinal virtues are "hinges" upon which the good life swings. There are four of them: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. The more one grows in the virtues, the freer and happier he or she becomes.

The enemy, fully aware of this, examines your spiritual life to find your *weakest point* and where you are *most in need* of eternal salvation. For example, a young man believes God, but tends to despair that he will obtain what God has promised. In other words, he struggles with the virtue of hope. For this man, the enemy will attack *against hope* by tempting him to discouragement.

Practically: Rule 14 reminds us of the importance of *knowing yourself*. Know your gifts and thank God for them. Additionally, know

your weaknesses, i.e., where you tend to struggle and fall. Knowing your weaknesses gives you the opportunity to focus your spiritual energy toward building them up to block the enemy's attack.

For example, are you weak in faith? Ask God to increase your faith and make little acts of faith. Do you lack temperance? Perform little acts of self-sacrifice (e.g., no sweets on Fridays – I know, this is *really* hard) to strengthen your will. Are you weak in charity? Ask God to help you grow in love and go out of your way to deny yourself for others. The key is to know your weakness and focus your spiritual energy in those areas.

Summary: In Luke's Gospel, Jesus begins His public ministry by returning to Nazareth where He grew up. He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath where He stood up to read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

Unrolling the scroll, Jesus proclaimed, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim an acceptable year to the Lord."* (Lk 4:16-19)

St. Ignatius *Rules for Discernment* are about spiritual freedom, i.e., the freedom to know what is stirring in your heart, understanding who is speaking to you, and what actions to take. This, of course, does not happen overnight. Instead, it takes practice via continued prayer, effort, and the helps that Ignatius provides in his 14 Rules. While not easy, the reward is priceless: Spiritual freedom and greater union with the Lord who loves us in this life and in the life to come.



Goldy keeping lookout to protect the weakest point