

Rule 5

No Change in Desolation

We continue our discussion of St. Ignatius' *Rules for Discernment* by looking at Rule 5. St. Ignatius' first four rules are primarily instructive, i.e., they give us the language to help us understand the movements in our hearts. After laying the fundamental groundwork, Ignatius begins providing guidelines for action. In other words, if you are in spiritual desolation, what actions can you take? Let us begin by looking at Rule 5.

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.*

Ignatius speaks about those in spiritual desolation. Such desolation can last a brief moment, an hour, a day, or weeks at a time. Those in spiritual desolation should never make a change, but be firm and constant in the resolutions and determinations they made prior to their desolation.

Note: Ignatius' teaching in this rule does not address *nonspiritual* desolation. For example, healthy changes are in order for a woman exhausted from work or a father caring for his children (e.g., more rest, healthy eating, time for prayer, etc.). This rule does not address nonspiritual situations that can lead to injurious consequences.

In spiritual desolation, recall the signs of heavy affectivity: agitation, lacking confidence, slothfulness, sadness, and feelings of separation from his/her Creator and Lord. In desolation, one struggles to lift up one's heart to God, but rather is drawn to "low and earthly things."

In Rule 5, Ignatius gives a categorical imperative: *In time of desolation, never make a change.* Some examples may provide clarity on this point. In consolation, a young man growing in his faith decides to spend 20 minutes each day in prayer. After a week, he finds prayer dry and God feels distant. He begins to lack confidence that his prayer is worthwhile. Consequently, he thinks about cutting back on his prayer or avoid it completely.

A woman decides to commit herself to serving the poor one day each week by serving meals at the local shelter. Initially, she finds great joy in serving those whom Jesus loves. A month in, she feels slothful, tepid, and distant from the Lord. In response, she thinks about skipping

her ministry for the week. According to Rule 5, neither should change the resolutions they made in consolation.

When I first began learning these rules, the priest teaching them said, "If there is only one rule you remember, let it be this one." Rule 5 is critically important. Ignatius teaches us to keep our resolutions and determinations that were made prior to our desolation. Of course, this presumes that our resolutions in consolation were reasonable. ☺

Ignatius gives the reason for his teaching. He says that in consolation, it is the good spirit who guides and counsels us, while in desolation it is the bad. In desolation, the bad spirit is predominant and never counsels rightly.

In consolation, the good spirit counsels and guides us. God speaks to us in our thoughts and gives us inspirations while in consolation. Hence, in consolation, it is appropriate to review our earlier proposals and make any necessary changes.

In desolation, however, the bad spirit is primarily at work. He counsels in ways that lead to spiritual diminishment. One tactic he frequently uses is claiming your spiritual past (it has always been like this) and the future (you will never feel God's loving presence again). We reject such lies and instead maintain our resolutions to grow spiritually.

Spiritual desolation is akin to looking in a warped mirror. We do not see God or ourselves clearly. In desolation, storms swirl around our spiritual antenna making it difficult to stay tuned into God. Hence, we wait for the storm to pass before changing our resolutions or determinations. In short, we cling to Jesus, knowing He will help us!

Practically: If you recognize the symptoms of spiritual desolation in your life, remain firm in your prayer. Speak to the Lord about your difficulties, including how you feel, your struggles, and how He feels distant or absent from you. This itself is a prayer. Acknowledge the heaviness of your heart and relate it to the Lord, asking Him for help!

Finally, let the saints encourage you. Regardless of their experience, they spoke to the Lord as a friend speaks to a friend. By maintaining their resolutions during their storms, they stayed the course and made their way to the Lord who was their hope and their joy.



Goldy maintaining his resolution to stay cute