

Rule 9

Causes of Desolation

We continue with our summer series on St. Ignatius' *Rules for Discernment*. In Rules 6-8, we learned that we do not just passively endure desolation, but rather act against it. Through prayer, meditation, reflection, and extending ourselves in penance, we can resist the temptations of the enemy as we wait patiently for God to console us again.

In Rule 9, Ignatius considers the important question of "Why?" Why does I experience sadness, tepidness, slothfulness, and feel as if I am separated from God? Why does God permit us to experience such trials? Let us look at the reasons why we may experience desolation.

Ninth Rule. *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 consolation 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 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.*

Ignatius gives three "principal causes" for which we find ourselves in desolation. There may be other reasons, but Ignatius only discusses three principal reasons.

The **first** is a means to heal us our faults. We may have become negligent in our prayer or other devotions to God. Consequently, God withdraws His consolation to bring about conversion. His withdrawal is an expression of love. God's healing love invites us to make the necessary changes that move us closer to Him again.

The **second** is a trial to see how much we extend ourselves in God's service and praise without so much payment of consolation and increased graces. In other words will we continue to serve God, even when such service does not return feelings of peace, rest, and delight?

In short, spiritual desolation reveals what or whom we love. Do we love the consolation (spiritual comfort/peace) or do we love God who is our consolation? Do we seek more graces for personal gain (vanity) or for the One who gives the graces? Spiritual desolation, then, purifies our hearts so that we stay focused on Jesus, who is the source, motivation, and reward of our love.

The **third** reason that Ignatius provides is the lengthiest. It is about humility. Spiritual desolation reveals how weak we are and how much we need the Lord. Because we are fallen, we are tempted toward self-reliance (I can do it on my own) and pride (*I accomplished this*).

Jesus reminds us, "*Without me you can do nothing.*" (Jn 15:6) He did not say you can do a few things, but rather "nothing." Spiritual desolation reminds us that all graces (including consolation) are a gift from God. Our desire for prayer, the peace and joy of serving the Lord, and the intense love for Him are all gifts. Our proper response is gratitude. Spiritual desolation, for its part, humbles us and helps us realize that we are weak and in great need of God's strength.

Practically: Rule 9 is insightful in that it helps us see spiritual desolation from God's perspective. He wants us to grow in His service, and so may remove spiritual comforts (peace) when we become slothful to bring about conversion. Through desolation, He may seek to purify our hearts so we love Him alone. Finally, He may permit desolation so we become keenly aware of our weakness and how much we need Him. In short, although trying, spiritual desolation can be a great opportunity to grow in our love for and service to the Lord.



Goldy teaching baby Eliot reasons for desolation and how to stay close to Jesus