

## **Rules 6-8**

### *Diminishing Desolation*

We continue with our summer series on St. Ignatius' *Rules for Discernment*. Just a reminder that these columns will be posted on our parish website under "Welcome; St. Ignatius." From Rule 5, we learned that in spiritual desolation we should never make a change. Instead, we should remain firm in our resolutions made prior to the desolation (e.g., maintain our prayer time, spiritual reading, serving others, etc.).

We now move to a new set of rules that provide positive steps to diminish the effects of desolation. While we cannot bring ourselves out of desolation (only God can do that), we can take steps to diminish its severity (e.g., more intensive prayer, penance, etc.). Let us look at Rules 6-8, which provide positive steps to work against spiritual desolation.

***Sixth Rule:*** *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.*

This rule reminds us that we never just passively accept desolation until it passes. For example, we must not say, "Oh well. I guess this is what God wants. This is just my cross. My task is to bear it the best I can." Instead, Ignatius says it is "advantageous" to "change ourselves" against the desolation. Let's unpack the examples that he provides.

**Prayer** could be a prayer of *petition*. We ask God for help. "Lord, I feel sad, down, or distant from you. Please help me." **Meditation** could be reading over a passage of Sacred Scripture slowly, pondering the truths of our faith (e.g., Psalm 23). **Much examination** means taking time to reflect on my heart and actions. If my heart is heavy, have I been drawn to "low and earthly things" (e.g., instant gratifications)? Finally, Ignatius suggests undertaking some suitable way of doing **penance**. For example, if I normally take 20 minutes of prayer, I could lengthen my prayer time by a couple of minutes.

In short, Rule 6 is about making choices to claim our relationship with God. We can and should take active steps to resist desolation.

***Seventh Rule:*** *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 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.*

Rules 5 & 6 are about changes to avoid and changes to do respectively. Rule 7 is about how to *think* in desolation. Ignatius invites us to think about spiritual desolation *from God's perspective*.

In God's mysterious providence, He allows desolation for a purpose. For example, it may be trial, i.e., a way of progressing toward God. Ignatius does not provide specifics. We simply make an act of faith that God sees and knows more than we do. While difficult, we remember this fundamental truth: "*God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it.*" (1 Cor. 10:13)

***Eighth Rule:*** *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.*

This rule invites us to *work* toward something (maintain an attitude of patience) and to *think* of something (we will soon be consoled). The key virtue is patience in that consolation will return.

Unfortunately, desolation tends to claim our spiritual past and future. "I have never felt close to God," and "I will always feel this way." The enemy, of course, proposes such lies to *discourage* us. In response, we work to be patient (continue our prayer, doing good, etc.) and think about the consolation that will return.

**Practically:** Rules 6-8 remind us that we are not pawns who passively just accept our spiritual experiences. While we cannot bring ourselves out of desolation, we can choose to act against it, resist the temptations of the enemy, and think about the consolation that will return. In short, these rules remind us that while we may be struggling in desolation, God has not abandoned us. Instead, He gives us the graces we need to grow in and through the trial.



**Baby:** "Goldy, I am in desolation. What do I do?"

**Goldy:** "Hang in there little buddy. God will console you soon."