

Rule 3 *Spiritual Consolation*

We continue with our summer series on St. Ignatius *14 Rules for Spiritual Discernment*. Rules 1 & 2 concern categories of persons. **Rule 1** is about those moving away from God. In this case, the enemy proposes pleasures to keep them in their sins, while the good spirit bites to bring about conversion. **Rule 2** concerns those moving toward God. In this case, the good spirit encourages, while the enemy bites, saddens, and places obstacles to hinder their progress.

We now move to Rule 3, which concerns consolation. It is important to realize that all the rules moving forward only apply to those in Rule 2, i.e., those moving toward God. Those moving away from God (Rule 1) are in need of conversion. One must be on the right train before we can begin talking about specifics in the train.

Rule 3: *The third is of spiritual consolation. I call it consolation when some interior movement is caused in the soul, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and, consequently when it can love no created thing on the face of the earth itself, but only in the Creator of them all.*

Likewise when it sheds tears that move to love of its Lord, whether out of sorrow for one's sins or for the passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other things directly ordered to His service and praise.

Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy that calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord.

St. Ignatius speaks about *spiritual* consolation. There are natural consolations like eating an ice cream cone or petting a golden retriever. However, Ignatius is concerned with consolation that pertains to our life of faith and pursuit of God's will. Natural consolation can be a springboard to spiritual consolation (e.g., seeing a beautiful sunset draws your heart to God).

Interestingly, Ignatius says consolation is an interior movement "caused" in the soul. In other words, it is a gift. We cannot give ourselves spiritual consolation. We receive it as a gift in gratitude.

In consolation, the soul comes to be inflamed with love for its Creator and Lord. In consolation, the heart moves upward like an eagle. In St. Augustine's *Confessions*, he says, "Late have I loved you, beauty so old

and so new: late have I loved you." As Augustine reflects on God's patience and wisdom, he breaks out in joy in his love for God.

Additionally, in consolation the soul loves all created things on the face of the earth in their proper order. All things are loved rightly, i.e., insofar as they reflect God's goodness and draw the soul back to God.

Ignatius adds that those in consolation may shed tears for various reasons. For example, they may shed "sweet tears," or tears that express the heart's love for the Lord. Tears of joy expressing our love for God are truly graced moments.

Tears can also express sorrow for our sins. The Lord can grace us with a deep sorrow for past mistakes. Tears can also express our love for Jesus in His Passion. The cross is "pure love," or perfect love. Finally, tears may express things ordered to God's service and praise. For example, we can shed tears over the sufferings of family members and/or parishioners suffering as they serve God.

Ignatius concludes this rule by calling consolation *every increase of faith, hope, and charity, and all interior joy that calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord*. On a personal note, this description makes me think of a duck I saw paddling calmly across a lake while on retreat a couple of years ago. The Lord spoke to my heart, "Stop. Look!" I was taken by the peace. In consolation, our souls experience tranquility like the surface of a calm lake.

Practically: It is helpful to know that the experiences of consolation differ in both *intensity* and *duration*. Sometimes consolation may feel intense like a flaming fire, while at other times it may be the feeling of a gentle breeze.

Consolation can be experienced for just a brief moment, or it may endure throughout a period of prayer, an entire Mass (especially if the homily is good), or even several days or weeks at a time. Regardless, when it comes your way, smile and say, "Thank you Jesus!"



Goldy and friends in consolation