

Dealing with Desolation

As Ignacio was walking along a road one day, he met a Turkish Moor and engaged him in conversation. During the conversation, this Moor dishonored Mary and eventually walked away. So, Ignacio having the mentality of a medieval knight wanted to vindicate the name of his Lady, Mary, by following after the Moor and killing him. However, being newly converted, Ignacio decided to ask God what he should do.

So in order to figure out what God's will was, he would find out through the donkey: if the donkey followed the path that the Moor took then he would kill him. However, if the donkey went the other way, then he would not kill the Moor. Fortunately, the donkey went the other way! Ignacio was the Spanish name for St. Ignatius of Loyola and **it gives us comfort that even saints in their early days struggled to know the will of God!**

How do we know the will of God? How do we know God's working in our life?

These are the types of questions the Jewish leaders were asking about the apostles. Even though the leader of the apostles, Jesus Christ, was put to death, even though the apostles were put into prison and commanded not to preach about the Good News, they still fearlessly proclaimed the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead in the temple, and the Pharisees wanted to kill them.

But Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee, got up and began DISCERNING what was going on. He gave two examples of former movements which had gained a following: Theodas and Judas of Galilee. But he noticed a pattern: whenever these leaders were killed, then the movement ended. Therefore, he advises that they should leave the apostles alone because if it is the work of men, it will perish since their leader is dead. **But if it is the work of God, then they may be found to be fighting against him.**

What are some of the ways we can know God's working in our life? St. Ignatius eventually developed some rules for discernment through his own experience and prayer. St Ignatius identified two types of spiritual movements in our souls: spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation.

Spiritual consolation is an upward movement of the soul where the creature is enflamed with love for the Creator. **Spiritual desolation** is the contrary effect of spiritual consolation: a downward movement of the soul where the soul feels separated from God and there is a darkness and disturbance in the spiritual life. **It is important to identify these movements in our soul because we know how to respond.**

Sometimes we experience desolation after having committed to saying the rosary everyday or doing spiritual reading. St. Ignatius says that God is not the cause of desolation. He may allow it to happen but he does not cause desolation and the thoughts which follow from it. Spiritual desolation is caused by the evil spirit who is trying to sway us from the will of God which we have embarked upon. Therefore, we should not change our resolutions.

In order to overcome desolation, St. Ignatius advises that we should boldly and immediately reject the temptation to succumb to spiritual desolation, devote ourselves to more prayer and penance. The evil spirit is trying to drive us away from God and from the spiritual exercises we have committed to, but when the evil spirit sees that we are intensifying our spiritual rigor in times of spiritual desolation, **he will eventually go away and we will have thwarted his plans to sway us.**

NB: We should find a spiritual director if we have a hard time discerning these things.

We don't need donkeys to know the will of God in the concrete moments of our lives. God gives us ways of knowing his will because he cares for us and wants to lead us closer to him by giving us a reliable guide in St. Ignatius of Loyola so that we will be found not to be working AGAINST him but WITH him.