

MONTH FOUR

WEEK FIFTEEN EXERCISES

The Exercises of Week Fifteen are another week dedicated to reflecting on the remainder of the Ignatian Rules for Discernment. Use the assigned 'rule' of the day for your morning exercise and mid-day examen. Then, return to the same rule at the end of the day and note whether and how its wisdom may have shown up during your day.

SUNDAY, 28 DECEMBER

RULE SEVEN: TRUSTING IN TIMES OF DESOLATION

Let the one in desolation be reminded that the soul has natural, innate powers to resist the different agitations and temptations of 'the enemy of human nature.'* Though Divine Grace may not be clearly perceived, the greater Love is never absent from the soul.

Ignatian Wisdom "Consolation is typically associated as 'good' and desolation is taken to mean 'bad.' Clear discernment of spirits is essential lest good appear as evil and vice versa..." Carl Jung

*Ignatius' term for evil was 'the enemy of human nature.' Other commentators use the term, the 'predator' of human nature.

DAILY INTENTION

May I be attentive to the times I may be inclined towards discouragement.

MID DAY EXAMEN

May I be grateful for the unexpected appearances of grace and love.

END OF THE DAY EXAMEN

How/did my enhanced awareness today increase my ability to trust what is unfolding in my life?

MONDAY, 29 DECEMBER

RULE EIGHT: PATIENCE DURING DESOLATION

Let the one who is in desolation strive to be patient which feels contrary to the vexations of the moment. Recall that in the consolations appeared after desolations and that a time of consolation will soon return. Let the wisdom of the sixth Rule be a reminder of how to not lose hope.

Ignatian Wisdom: Let the wisdom of the sixth Rule be a reminder of how to not lose hope. end. For if all is not now well, it shall be in the end." -- Julian of Norwich

DAILY INTENTION

May I be attentive today to experiences of sadness and consolation.

MID DAY EXAMEN

How does it feel to be grateful today?

END OF THE DAY EXAMEN

Where were potential obstacles or challenges today (no matter how small) also accompanied by a sense of encouragement

TUESDAY, 30 DECEMBER

RULE NINE: THREE CAUSES OF DESOLATION

There are three principal reasons why we may find ourselves desolate:

The first is, because we may have grown tepid or negligent in our spiritual exercises; and as a result, spiritual consolation withdraws from us.

The second, is a result of losing perspective about the most important values in life.

The third, is a result of pride whereby we begin to believe that consolations are of our own creation rather than from the Source of Love and Grace. In such times we need to be reminded that we have put our energy into building an earthy nest which is not ours to keep. Authentic consolation awaits those whose energy is focused on the greater lasting things.

Ignatian Wisdom: Blaming others or becoming a victim keeps us trapped in desolation.

During dark nights of the soul engage in activities that align with your values and bring a sense of meaning to your life.

“Helping others can be as beneficial to your spiritual and emotional well-being as receiving support.” Karl Rahner, SJ

DAILY INTENTION

May I be aware today of moments when a spirit of love shows up in my life?

MID DAY EXAMEN

What small ways am I in touch with my heart’s deepest desires?

END OF THE DAY EXAMEN

How does The following wisdom affirm that ‘I am on the right path’?

“Discovering the Divine Will is no further than the deepest desires of your own heart.

The profound peace and spiritual consolation that follow are a sign you’re on the right path.”

-- Pope Francis

WEDNESDAY, 31 DECEMBER

RULE TEN: IMPERMANENCE

Let someone who is now in consolation think how he may again be in the desolation that follows-- but take strength for the grace available in both states.

Ignatian Wisdom: Holy Indifference allows the soul to stay in balance during swings of consolation and desolation.

Holy Indifference is similar to WuWei (not-doing) of the Tao, where we let go of our agenda to rest in Higher Wisdom.

DAILY INTENTION

May I be aware today of any thoughts of discouragement, depression or agitation.

MID DAY EXAMEN

How can I find a space for gratitude for any movements (past or present) of desolation?

END OF THE DAY EXAMEN

How can the experience of The Exercises support a healthy spirit when desolation appears?

Perhaps the following description of desolation from St. Ignatius offers practical insight:

Desolation can be recognized by its lack of confidence, hopelessness and absence of love. In such a state one finds oneself lazy, tepid, sad, and separated from the Source of Love.

THURSDAY, 1 JANUARY

RULE ELEVEN: HUMILITY AND GRACE

Let one who is consoled remain humble as the grace of such times is truly a gift to be savored. On the contrary, let one who is in desolation be reminded that the soul possesses grace sufficient to resist despair and the dark night, taking strength in the Source of Divine Love.

Wisdom Teaching: Trust that the wisdom of creation is within you and that love is stronger than death.

“Whatever painful growth and change may lie ahead, it is leading to life and not destruction.”
Margaret Silf

DAILY INTENTION

May I be aware today of any temptations to mistrust the consolations experienced in The Exercises.

MID DAY EXAMEN

How can I replace mistrust and doubt with confident gratitude?

END OF THE DAY EXAMEN

**How does Rule Eleven match my life experience in times of self doubt and self-sabotage?
How/do my experience with The Exercises over these months affirm Ignatius' advice to his friends:**

Wisdom Teaching: "Remain resolute about not changing your decisions in times of desolation but redouble every effort and remain committed to what was once discerned in the light."

FRIDAY, 2 JANUARY

RULE TWELVE: THE ENEMY OF HUMAN NATURE*

It is the way of the enemy to weaken and lose heart and take flight when a person who is exercising in spiritual things opposes with a bold front that which is diametrically opposed to our true spiritual nature. And on the contrary, if the person who is exercising himself commences to have fear and lose heart, there is no beast so wild on the face of the earth as the enemy of human nature in pursuing a fearful soul out of *his* damnable intention to do great malice.

Ignatian Wisdom: A paradox of human nature is that our hearts are divided between good and evil impulses.

"There is danger in facing evil but it is more dangerous if not faced at all..." Gerald May

"The dragon is not evil itself but refusal to believe in the dragon is the doom of earth people."
Black Elk

*The original text uses some misogynistic language in describing the relationships between men and women. Modern commentators translate the twelfth rule with more apt metaphors for our times.

DAILY INTENTION

May the wisdom of The Exercises offer guidance for future movements of desolation.

MID DAY EXAMEN

May I be grateful for past grace that enabled me to survive difficult periods of desolation.

END OF THE DAY EXAMEN

How/do either of these scriptures speak to me about life's most challenging moments:

"Before you are life and death, blessing and curse, (in every moment) choose life."

Deuteronomy 30, 19

"Come to me who are weary and find life burdensome... and you will find rest for your souls."

Matthew 11, 28-30

SATURDAY, 3 JANUARY

RULE THIRTEEN: SECRET TO DEFEAT DECEIT

The enemy of human nature does not want our dark doubts and secrets to be revealed. For when depraved intentions are brought to light, the temptation towards self-loathing and self-doubt cannot succeed. So a soul that wishes to remain at peace, will do well to reveal its secrets and temptations to a spiritual companion who knows how to discern between consolation and desolation and between temporary desolation and a dark night of the soul.

Ignatian Wisdom: It is dangerous to trust your own discernment during times of desolation.

"...at such times a trusted spiritual companion is needed not as an advice giver but as a sounding board to help the individual remember their deepest desires which are easily lost during times of desolation." John English, SJ

DAILY INTENTION

May the wisdom of The Exercises remind me of 'the peace that is beyond all understanding' during times of challenge and discouragement.

MID DAY EXAMEN

May I be grateful in recognizing there is nothing to hide in the spiritual life.

END OF THE DAY EXAMEN

Consider who has been or could be now the kind of spiritual companion needed to remind me of my deepest desires when I am tempted to forget them.