

Making a Choice

In making a choice or decision it is of central importance to seek God's will - to serve God and my fellow human beings and to respect self and use my gifts wisely and to the full. God rarely wants us to do things that we are totally temperamentally unsuited.

1. Sometimes what I have to do comes with great and unmistakable clarity – it is blindingly obvious.
At other times I feel enthusiasm for a choice and dullness with other options. The up and down movements of my spirit can lead me gradually to a realisation of where my heart lies – where God is prompting me.
2. There are times when I have to work out logically the best choice, looking at all the pro's and cons. But even when I have finished making a choice this way, I should 'feel' comfortable and consoled with the final decision.

Consolation and Desolation

Traditionally the terms '*consolation*' and '*desolation*' have been used to describe our general sense of well-being. Consolation, when we feel things are right; a sense of being in the right place and doing what is right. Often, there is a sense of joy that comes with consolation. Life might be hard, and things might not always be joyful, but there is a deep-down sense of contentment. Desolation on the other hand is where things don't seem to be right. There is a feeling of unease and there is certainly not a joyful feel to life.

We seek to stay with consolation.

If we have a sense of desolation we see if it is obvious what is causing it; could be to do with our work, relationships, prayer etc. If we can make changes, good. We can find ourselves in desolation when we are following the promptings of the bad spirit. Sometimes desolation is God's way of nudging us to make changes.

When in desolation we seek to move back to consolation.

DISCERNMENT

Ignatius of Loyola developed his Spiritual Exercises to help people know, love and follow Christ, and to come to decisions about where to go and what to do in their lives.

The process involves the followers of Christ becoming more sensitive to the action of God in their lives.

The underlying aim of the Exercises is one of trusting self and feelings.

The belief is that God's desire for each one of us is that we should be at peace and joyful.

Our normal state should be one of consolation.

Therefore, when faced with choices, it is good to choose what brings a sense of contentment, what gives 'consolation'. We know from Christian teaching and everyday experience, that what brings deep human joy is not selfishness, shallow relationships, or having all that money can buy, but rather living a life of service, reaching out to others, especially those most in need, and a forgetfulness of self. Forgetfulness of self does not imply despising or not liking self, rather it is based on self-acceptance, respect and appreciation of that great gift of God to me - which is my own self. It is only when I see myself as good and lovable that I can have anything good to offer others and God.

As we are pre-programmed to gain consolation from doing what is right and desolation from doing wrong, Ignatian spirituality seeks to find what brings us consolation and through this, know what is right for us – what is God's will.

Ignatius uses the imagery of his time, seeing the soul as the battle ground between the spirits of good and evil. – God and the enemy of our human nature.

We have the free-will to follow the promptings of either the good or bad spirit. Some people like to translate this as a sort of inner movement rather than external powers.

But whatever our preferred imagery, we can see it as a choice between what brings life and joy and what deadens our spirit.

We should seek only God's glory, not our own.



Some Rules for

Discernment of Spirits

(Based on St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises)

For anyone who is genuinely seeking to do what is right:

The Good Spirit will bring:

- enthusiasm
- life
- strength
- tears
- encouragement
- views of a way ahead
- peace and consolation
- realism
- an acknowledgement and sorrow for sin, but peace as a loved and forgiven sinner called to follow Christ.

The Bad Spirit will bring:

- endless problems & difficulties
- doubts
- Desolation and confusion
- We feel mired in our sin; unchangeable and unforgivable.
- We don't see a future.
- We are weighed down
- We have no taste for prayer or spiritual things, we are rebellious and selfish.
- We are encouraged to give up!
- The ultimate success of the evil one is suicide.

God encourages, beckons, gently, invites us on.

The evil one forces, or suggests there is no choice.

When we think there is no choice perhaps we are not thinking radically enough, perhaps the real choice is bigger than we imagine.

If we know our own weakness, we will know where temptation is most likely to strike – our weaknesses are so often the shadow side of our greatest gifts.

In times of desolation stay put, don't change plans made in consolation. Only change when something that promises to be more fruitful comes up.

Desolation might be positive, it could turn us to God, or help us realise that consolation is God's gift, not our own doing.

When suffering from desolation, try to return to consolation. It might be useful to return to what brought consolation in the past.

In times of consolation, store the memory for the bad times. Try to stay with consolation.

Often the person who is trying really hard to do what is right will find themselves attacked by unsettling, even crude temptations. Such a person may be so encouraged to doubt their naturally mixed motives in doing good that they turn away from doing good. The focus has been brought round to self and one's own motives, not on the needs of the other.

It is also normal to get 'cold feet' when faced with big decisions – remember that even 'big' decisions are rarely for life.

The things of God tend to be open to the light; the things of evil tend to secrecy and duplicity. Therefore being open and talking to someone about our choices can be helpful.

