Fit for Prayer: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Rules for Discernment.  
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1. The Spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola is particularly helpful because it is one of the spiritualities in the Church that was designed for the active life.
2. St. Ignatius provides us with a whole arsenal of tools to use in the spiritual life.
   1. Tools:
      1. The Silent Retreat: How to Meditate on Christ’s life.
      2. The Rules of Discernment.
      3. The Examen.
   2. Key Books: *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living,* by Timothy Gallagher, O.M.V.,The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2005.

*The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today*, by Timothy Gallagher, O.M.V.,The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2006.

1. The Silent Retreat: To Meditate on Christ’s life.
   1. St. Ignatius developed what he called the spiritual exercises.
   2. Three keys to the retreat – silence, meditation and direction (discernment).
   3. Retreat is split up into 4 weeks that takes a person through the whole life of Christ.
      1. No. 23 of Spiritual exercises:
         1. “Man is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.

The other things on the earth are created for man, to help him in the pursuit of the end for which he was created.

From this it follows that I ought to use these things to the extent that they help me toward my end, and free myself from them to the extent that they hinder from it.

To attain this is necessary to make myself indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to my free will and is not forbidden. Consequently, on my own part I ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all other matters.

Rather, I ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which I am created.”

1. Rules for discernment.
   1. One of the main purposes of the 30 day retreat was to teach people discernment of spirits.
      1. Put simply discernment is learning to notice the movements in my soul.
      2. Movements for Ignatius are good or bad.
      3. Movements in my soul come from 3 places: Myself, Enemy, God.
      4. St. Ignatius names these movements Consolations and desolations.
   2. We all experience ups and downs in the spiritual life – Moments when we have great energy and we find desire to pray and serve.
   3. St. Ignatius is trying to help us become aware so that we can follow God.
      1. Discernment of Spirits:
         1. Become aware “his eyes were opened just a little.”
         2. To understand… to try and figure out where these movements are coming from and what they mean.
         3. Respond – the good to accept, the bad to reject.
   4. Look at Rules 1-5, 13.
2. Importance of Examen.

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS: EXAMPLES

St. Ignatius: “As he read them over many times, he became rather fond of what he found written there. Putting his reading aside, he sometimes stopped to think about the things he had read and at other times about the things of the world that he used to think about before. Of the many vain things that presented themselves to him, one took such a hold on his heart that he was absorbed in thinking about it for two or three or four hours without realizing it: he imagined what he would do in the service of a certain lady, the means he would take so he could go to the country where she lived, the verses, the words he would say to her, the deeds of arms he would do in her service. He became so conceited with this that he did not consider how impossible it would be because the lady was not of the lower nobility nor a countess nor a duchess, but her station was higher than any of these.

Nevertheless, Our Lord assisted him, causing other thoughts that arose from the things he read to follow these. While reading the life of Our Lord and of the saints, he stopped to think, reasoning within himself: “What if I should do what St. Francis did, what St. Dominic did?” So he pondered over many things that he found to be good, always proposing to himself what was difficult and serious, and as he proposed them, they seemed to him easy to accomplish. But his every thought was to say to himself, “St. Dominic did this, therefore, I have to do it. St. Francis did this, therefore, I have to do it.” These thoughts also lasted a good while, but when other matters intervened, the worldly thoughts mentioned above returned, and he also spent much time on them (23-24).

This succession of such diverse thoughts lasted for a long time and he always dwelt at length on the thought before him, either of the worldly deeds he wished to achieve or of the deeds of God that came to his imagination, until he tired of it and put it aside and turned to other matters.

Yet there was this difference. When he was thinking about the things of the world, he took much delight in them, but afterwards, when he was tired and put them aside, he found that he was dry and discontented. But when he thought of going to Jerusalem, barefoot and eating nothing but herbs and undergoing all the other rigors that he saw the saints had endured, not only was he consoled when he had these thoughts, but even after putting them aside, he remained content and happy.

He did not notice this, however, nor did he stop to ponder the difference until one time his eyes were opened a little, and he began to marvel at the difference and to reflect upon it, realizing from experience that some thoughts left him sad and others happy. Little by little he came to recognize the difference between the spirits that agitated him, one from the demon, the other from God.”

**Rule 1**

**St. Augustine**: “In my youth I burned to fill myself with evil things… I dared to run wild in different and dark ways of passion.”

This was the nature of my sickness. I was in torment, reproaching myself more bitterly than ever as I twisted and turned in my chain. I hoped that my chain might be broken once and for all, because it was only a small thing that held me now… And you, O Lord, never ceased to watch over my secret heart. In your stern mercy you lashed me with the twin scourge of fear and shame in case I should give way once more and the worn and slender remnant of my chain should not be broken but gain new strength and bind me all the faster. In my heart I kept saying ‘Let it be now, let it be now!’, and merely by saying this I was on the point of making the resolution. I was on the point of making it, but I did not succeed.

I stood on the brink of resolution… I tried again and came a little nearer to my goal, and then a little nearer still, so that I could almost reach out and grasp it. But I did not reach it….

I was held back by mere trifles, the most paltry inanities, all my old attachments. They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, ‘Are you going to dismiss us? From this moment we shall never be with you again, forever and ever. From this moment you will never be allowed to do this thing or that, for evermore… These voices… no longer barred my way, blatantly contradictory, but their mutterings seemed to reach me from behind, as though they were stealthily plucking at my back, trying to make me turn my head when I wanted to go forward. Yet in my state of indecision, they kept me from tearing myself away, from shaking myself free of them and leaping across the barrier to the other side, where you were calling me.

But by now… I had turned my eyes elsewhere, and while I stood trembling at the barrier, on the other side I could see the chaste beauty of Continence in all her serene, unsullied joy, as she modestly beckoned me to cross over and to hesitate no more. She stretched out loving hands to welcome and embrace me, holding up a host of good examples to my sight. With her were countless boys and girls, great numbers of the young and people of all ages… And in their midst was Continence herself, not barren but a fruitful mother of children, of joys born of you, O Lord, her Spouse. She smiled at me to give me courage, as though she were saying, ‘Can you not do what these men and women do? Do you think they find the strength to do it in themselves and not in the Lord their God? … Why do you try to stand in your own strength and fail? Cast yourself upon God and have no fear. He will not shrink away and let you fall. Cast yourself upon him without fear, for he will welcome you and cure you of your ills.”

**Rule 2**

**St. Ignatius to Sr. Teresa Rejadell**: “The enemy is leading you into error… but not in any way to make you fall into a sin that would separate you from God our Lord. He tries rather to upset you and to interfere with your service of God and your peace of mind.”

“We find ourselves sad without knowing why. We cannot pray with devotion, nor contemplate, nor even speak or hear of the things of God with any interior taste or relish.”

“The enemy as a rule follows this course. He places obstacles and impediments in the way of those who love and begin to serve God our Lord, and this is the first weapon he uses in his efforts to wound them. He asks, for instance: “How can you continue a life of such great penance, deprived of all satisfaction from friends, relatives, possessions? How can you lead so lonely a life, with no rest, when you can save your soul in other ways and without such dangers?” He tries to bring us to understand that we must lead a life that is longer than it will actually be, by reason of the trials he places before us and which no one ever underwent.”

**Rule 3**

**St. Elizabeth Seton**: “In the year 1789, when my father was in England, one morning in May, in the lightness of a cheerful heart, I jumped in the wagon that was driving to the woods for brush, about a mile from home; the boy who drove it began to cut, and I set off in the woods, soon found an outlet in a meadow; and a chestnut tree with several young ones growing around it, found rich moss under it and a warm sun. Here, then, was a sweet bed – the air still a clear blue vault above – the numberless sounds of spring melody and joy – the sweet clovers and wild flowers I had got by the way, and a heart as innocent as human heart could be, filled even with enthusiastic love to God and admiration of His works…

God was my Father, my all. I prayed, sang hymns, cried, laughed, talking to myself of how far He could place me above all sorrow. Then I laid still to enjoy the heavenly peace that came over my soul; and I am sure, in the two hours so enjoyed, grew ten years in the spiritual life….”

**St. Thérèse**: “Descending the steps leading into the garden, she saw a little white hen under a tree, protecting her little chicks under her wings; some were peeping out from under. Thérèse stopped, looking at them thoughtfully; after a while, I made a sign that we should go inside. I noticed her eyes were filled with tears, and I said: “You’re crying!” She put her hand over her eyes and cried even more.

“I can’t explain it just now; I’m too deeply touched.”

That evening, in her cell, she told me the following, and there was a heavenly expression on her face:

“I cried when I thought how God used this image in order to teach us his tenderness toward us. All through my life, this is what he has done for me! He has hidden me totally under his wings! Earlier in the day, when I was leaving you, I was crying when going upstairs; I was unable to control myself any longer, and I hastened to our cell. My heart was overflowing with love and gratitude.”

**Rule 4**

**St. Ignatius to Sr. Teresa Rejadell**: “I will call your attention briefly to two lessons which our Lord usually gives, or permits. The one of them he gives, the other he permits. The first is an interior consolation which casts out all uneasiness and draws one to a complete love of our Lord…. In a word, when this divine consolation is present all trials are pleasant and all weariness rest. He who goes forward with this fervor, warmth, and interior consolation finds every burden light and sweetness in every penance or trial, however great. This consolation points out and opens the way we are to follow and points out the way we are to avoid. It does not remain with us always, but it will always accompany us on the way at the times that God designates. All this is for our progress.

But when this consolation is absent the other lesson comes to light. Our ancient enemy sets up all possible obstacles to turn us aside from the way on which we have entered. He makes use of everything to vex us, and everything in the first lesson is reversed. We find ourselves sad without knowing why. We cannot pray with devotion, nor contemplate, nor even speak or hear of the things of God with any interior taste or relish. Not only this, but if he sees that we are weak and much humbled by these harmful thoughts, he goes on to suggest that we are entirely forgotten by God our Lord, and leads us to think that we are totally separated from him and that all that we have done and all that we desire to do is entirely worthless. He thus endeavors to bring us to a state of general discouragement…. For this reason is it necessary for us to be aware of our opponent.”

**Rule 13**

**St. Thérèse**: “The beautiful day of my wedding [final vows] finally arrived. It was without a single cloud; however, the preceding evening a storm arose in my soul, the like of which I’d never seen before.

Not a single doubt concerning my vocation had ever entered my mind until then, and it evidently was necessary that I experience this trial. In the evening, while making the Way of the Cross after Matins, my vocation appeared to me as a dream, a chimera. I found life in Carmel to be very beautiful, but the devil inspired me with the assurance that it wasn’t for me and that I was misleading my Superiors by advancing on this way to which I wasn’t called. The darkness was so great that I could understand one thing only: I didn’t have a vocation. Ah! how can I possibly describe the anguish in my soul?

It appeared to me (and this is an absurdity which shows it was a temptation from the devil) that if I were to tell my Novice Mistress about these fears, she would prevent me from pronouncing my Vows. And still I wanted to do God’s will and return to the world rather than remain in Carmel and do my own will.

I made the Novice Mistress come out of the choir and, filled with confusion, I told her the state of my soul. Fortunately, she saw things much clearer than I did, and she completely reassured me. The act of humility I had just performed put the devil to flight since he had perhaps thought that I would not dare admit my temptation. My doubts left me completely as soon as I finished speaking.

My doubts left me completely as soon as I finished speaking; nevertheless, to make my act of humility even more perfect, I still wished to confide my strange temptation to our Mother Prioress, who simply laughed at me.

In the morning of September 8, I felt as though I were flooded with a river of peace, and it was in this peace “which surpasses all understanding” [Phil 4:7] that I pronounced my Holy Vows.”