

# Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

## Guidelines for the Discernment of Spirits

### Part 7: Dealing with Consolation<sup>1</sup>

According to the dictionary, the word, “savor” means “to have experience of; to delight in or enjoy.” There are some things in life that are *so* good, they must be savored. Hopefully, all of us have some experiences of savoring things, such things as a good steak, tasty wine, exceptional conversation, a warm fire on a cold day, solitude, or beautiful music. Unfortunately, in our busy world, we often forget or neglect the importance of savoring. Thankfully, we have Saint Ignatius of Loyola to remind us of the blessings of savoring good things.

In rules #10 and #11 in his Spiritual Exercises, Saint Ignatius explains what we should do with consolations.<sup>2</sup> Like our experience of a good steak or exceptional conversation, spiritual consolations should be savored. And, just as our busyness in life often keeps us from savoring earthly blessings, it can cause us to quickly skip over spiritual consolations, as well. In order to encourage us to savor the spiritual consolations that God gives us, St. Ignatius offers two important guidelines for dealing with consolation.

Often, when something bad happens in our lives, we end up thinking about it over and over, day after day. For example, if we have an argument with a family member or a friend, we usually replay the argument in our heads for days or even weeks. Yet, how often do we mull over the good things? In rule #10, Ignatius invites us to enjoy periods of spiritual consolation by frequently mulling over them.

By reflecting and prayerfully meditating on the spiritual blessings we have received, we help to prepare ourselves for the times of desolation that will eventually come. Savoring our spiritual consolations can be as simple as beginning our prayer time by calling to mind the last spiritual blessing, or consolation, we received from God. As we ponder the experience, we can thank God for it and ask Him if there is anything else He would like to show us or teach us about the experience. We can also savor spiritual experiences by sharing them with friends or writing them down in our prayer journal.

Our gratitude for the experiences God has blessed us with is the subject of rule eleven. Saint Ignatius understood that times of consolation are always opportunities to grow in gratitude and humility—gratitude for God’s blessing and humility knowing that without God’s grace we would be hopeless. In this way, savoring a beautiful spiritual experience means keeping our attention focused on God instead of on us. There is always the temptation in “good times,” to become self-preoccupied. A good example of this would be the person who only prays when things are going bad. When things are going good, he or she forgets to pray. Why? Because in good times, it is easy for us to lose touch with our absolute *need* for God. Gratitude and humility ensure that we don’t forget about God.

These two rules on dealing with consolations are very important for our growth in the spiritual life. They are inviting us not to take for granted the consolations God grants us. Like a connoisseur who slowly enjoys a glass of vintage wine, we Christians are invited to savor the sweetness of God’s love by reflecting on His consolations.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is part seven of a twelve part series on the “Guidelines for the Discernment of Spirits” by St. Ignatius of Loyola.

<sup>2</sup> For definitions of “consolation” and “desolation,” see article #4.