Living the Discerning Life: 
The Spiritual Teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Discernment of Spirits Seminar: First Week Rules 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 of 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.

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 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 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 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 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 of friends, relatives or 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.”

Lucia: “That experience I had as I was leaving after my retreat a month ago made quite an impression on me. It certainly took me by surprise! My mind was in such confusion that I couldn’t comprehend what was happening to me. I didn’t understand how I could feel so bad so fast after feeling so good for so long. On my way home I was second-guessing my entire retreat and felt that due to my failure it had been a complete waste of time. I figured that I must have some serious problem and that maybe I had been dishonest by not bringing it up during the retreat. And since I didn’t even know what the “problem” was, I concluded that I was probably incapable of making a “good” retreat because I was incapable of being honest and open. The thought came to me that I should not waste your time and mine with these retreats. When I thought of calling you about it, I ran into still more obstacles. I felt that I really had no right to bother you—after all, my retreat was over. If things weren’t resolved during the retreat, that was my own fault.”

Rule 3

Raissa Maritain: “At the first invocation, Kyrie eleison, obliged to absorb myself, my mind arrested on the Person of the Father. Impossible to change the object. Sweetness, attraction, eternal youth of the heavenly Father. Suddenly, keen sense of his nearness, of his tenderness, of his incomprehensible love which impels him to demand our love, our thought. Greatly moved, I wept very sweet tears... Joy of being able to call him Father with a great tenderness, to feel him so kind and so close to me.”

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 awhile, 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 of 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

Alice is a dedicated woman of faith, active for years in her parish. Sharing the life of the parish is a source of spiritual strength for her and brings her joy in the Lord. More recently she has moved to a new town and joined the local parish. Here too Alice has sought involvement in the parish community but in her new setting has found this more difficult. A year passes amid struggles and she begins to question the value of her efforts.

“Alice sees herself as a pretty complete failure and feels altogether discouraged... Recently, even in her own personal prayer, she has experienced feelings of emptiness, of being abandoned by God. She feels that God is no longer near and she becomes overwhelmed with frustration. She wonders if she isn’t altogether losing her faith in God’s loving care. She does continue to be faithful to community worship and to her personal times for prayer, but it all seems hopeless and meaningless.”

Ruth has been experiencing spiritual desolation for the past week and has found her desolation deepening over the past few days. For several years she has participated in a Bible study group and has always found in these meetings rich nourishment for personal prayer and an encouraging sense of communion with others who share her love of God. Ruth consistently looks forward to these meetings and participates willingly. This week, however, she feels no energy towards the study of Scripture and toward sharing with others. In this time of desolation she has almost to force herself to attend the Bible study. Ruth is, in Ignatius’ sense here, wholly slothful with regard to an activity that brings her closer to God. She feels completely without spiritual energy with respect to the meeting.

Ruth does attend the Bible study despite her lack of attraction for it. The meeting is tasteless for her. The Scriptures do not come alive for her this time as they have in the past. She joins in the common prayer and contributes to the sharing but without affective involvement. She does her best “to get through it” as the group expects, but her heart is distant and unengaged. Ruth is, again in Ignatius’ sense here, totally tepid in carrying out a habitual practice of her spiritual life. She is faithful, but feels no fervor as she participates in the Bible study.
As the burdensome days of desolation continue, Ruth increasingly feels a sense of sadness. There is little “interior joy which calls and attracts to heavenly things” now in her life of faith. Often God seems far away and her spiritual life, formerly Ruth’s greatest cause of happiness, is now a source of heaviness. She fears that she has regressed spiritually and that her spiritual condition may continue to worsen. In her time of spiritual desolation Ruth has become sad in her life of faith.

St. Ignatius to Sr. Teresa Rejadell: “I will call to 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 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 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 5

St. Ignatius: “In the customary prayer I felt great devotion and from midway on there was much of it, clear, lucid and as it were warm. Once in the chapel, as I saw some going down the stairway in a hurry and at great pace, I did not feel ready to celebrate the mass and I returned to my room to prepare myself. Composing myself with tears, I returned to the chapel. During a part of the mass I felt a great devotion, sometimes with movement to tears. During the other part I struggled many times with what I would do to finish, because I was not finding what I was seeking... When the mass was finished, and afterward in my room, I found myself totally alone and without help of any kind, without power to relish any of my mediators or any of the Divine Persons, but so remote and separated from them, as if I had never felt anything of them, or never would feel anything again. Rather, thoughts came to me sometimes against Jesus, sometimes against another person, being so confused with different thoughts, such as to leave the house and rent a room so as to avoid the noise, or go without eating, or to begin the masses over again, or to put the altar on a higher floor. In
nothing could I find peace since I desired to finish at a time when my soul was in consolation and completely at rest.”

Rule 6

Ray has long placed faith at the center of his life and in recent years, especially, has grown closer to the Lord. He rejoices in seeing that, as a result of his spiritual growth, his love for his wife and children has deepened and their family bond is now stronger. Each day as he rides the commuter train to work he dedicates a few minutes to reading from Scripture. Today on his way to work he finds himself distracted and unable to read with attention or to reflect fruitfully. He arrives at work and the busyness of the morning envelopes him, but he is also vaguely conscious of a certain interior malaise. While his fellow workers have no direct awareness of his deepening faith in the Lord, they have noticed a change in Ray recently and appreciate his ready smile and willingness to help; today, however, he struggles even to be patient with them and only wishes the working hours to end.

The lunch hour arrives. As the hour begins Ray normally takes a few minutes, alone in his office, to lift his heart to God in prayer. Today he feels no desire to pray and does not; instead he finds himself considering taking his meal in a nearby place where he knows the surroundings and conversation are not conducive to his life of faith. Ray is on the point of leaving the office with this intention when suddenly he stops. He is aware that his heart is troubled; his distracted prayer on the train, his lack of willingness to assist his companions in the office, his omission of habitual prayer as his lunch hour began, and now his readiness to follow what he knows is a temptation with potentially harmful consequences — all of these signal that something is spiritually amiss. Ray senses that he must address this.

He sits down at his desk in the silence of his office and asks the Lord’s help to understand what is occurring within him. He remembers how only the day before he was happy and energetic in his service of the Lord, of others at work, and of his family. As he reflects, he is able to pinpoint the moment the change took place. Before leaving home this morning, preoccupied with his preparations for work, he unthinkingly brushed aside a request for attention from his little son. His wife was present and Ray saw the hurt in her eyes, mirroring the hurt in those of his son. Rushed and impatient, he responded to neither and left for work. Ray perceives that this was the moment when he lost his peace; this was the origin of the malaise he has felt since and which has burdened everything thus far in the day: prayer, relationships at work, even his present decision regarding where he will take lunch.

This new sense of clarity lightens his heart and he grasps clearly what he must do. He calls his wife and expresses his sorrow for his impatience that morning and for the hurt he caused her and his son. Her joy in their conversation lifts his heart further. He prays as usually in his office. He rejects the thought of taking lunch in the inappropriate place and eats with his office companions as usual. Now he finds that
his smile again comes easily and that his habitual willingness to assist the others has returned.

- “myself-in-desolation”
- “myself-reflecting-on-myself-in-desolation”

**Spiritual Exercises**, no. 13: “We must remember that during the time of consolation it is easy, and requires only a slight effort, to continue a whole hour in contemplation, but in time of desolation it is very difficult to do so. Hence, in order to fight against the desolation and conquer the temptation, the exercitant must always remain in the exercise a little more than the full hour. Thus he will accustom himself not only to resist the enemy, but even to overthrow him.”

**Rule 7**

**Blessed Angela of Foligno**: “During this period I was in a state of great stress, for it seemed to me that I felt nothing of God, and I also had the impression that I was abandoned by him; nor was I able to confess my sins. On the one hand, I thought that perhaps this had happened to me because of my pride, and on the other hand, I perceived so clearly the depths of my many sins that it did not seem to me that I could confess them with adequate contrition or even so much as say them. It seemed to me that there was no way in which I could bring them out into the open. Nor could I even praise God or remain in prayer. It seemed to me that all that was left of God in me was the conviction that I had not suffered as many trials as I deserved and, similarly, that I did not want to fall away from his grace by sinning for all the good or evil or sufferings that the world has to offer, nor did I want to assent to any evil. I was in this intense and terrible state of torment for more than four weeks.”

**Rule 8**

**Servant of God Elizabeth Leseur**: “Cowardice, weakness, awkwardness in my demeanor with others—things that can harm the ideas I cherish; acute physical suffering and deep moral suffering; in the midst of this a will unshakably turned to God, a plenitude of confidence in Him and love for Him; daily duties performed at whatever cost by great effort, without fervor, but still performed; then, little by little, calm returning to me and divine strength penetrating me again; new and energetic resolutions, the hope that God will help me to do my duty, all my duty—that is the tale of these last weeks and of my soul during this time.”

“More than two months in the dejection of almost continual physical suffering, and with terrible anxiety on Juliette’s account; the miserable belief that my illness will last as long as I do, always impeding my life. Complete resignation, but without joy or any inner consolation. The resolve to use my misfortunes for the good of souls. To fill my life with prayer, work and charity. To maintain serenity through everything. To love more than ever those who are the dear companions of my life.”
Thomas Green, S.J.: “Desolations will come; they are, in fact, as normal a part of human life as are rainy days.”

Julian of Norwich: “And after this he revealed a supreme spiritual delight in my soul. In this delight I was filled full of everlasting surety, powerfully secured without any painful fear. This sensation was so welcome and so spiritual that I was wholly at peace, at ease and at rest, so that there was nothing upon the earth which could have afflicted me. This lasted only for a time, and then I was changed, and abandoned to myself, oppressed and weary of my life and ruing myself, so that I hardly had the patience to go on living. I felt that there was no ease or comfort for me except faith, hope and love, and truly I felt very little of this. And then presently God gave me again comfort and rest for my soul, delight and security so blessedly and so powerfully that there was no fear, no sorrow, no pain, physical or spiritual, that one could suffer which might have disturbed me. And then again I felt the pain, and afterwards the delight and the joy, now the one and now the other, again and again, I suppose about twenty times. And in the time of joy I could have said with St. Paul: Nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ; and in the pain I could have said with St. Peter: Lord, save me, I am perishing. This vision was shown to teach me to understand that some souls profit by experiencing this, to be comforted at one time, and at another to fail and to be left to themselves. God wishes us to know that he keeps us safe all the time, in sorrow and in joy.”

Rule 9

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<th>God’s Reason</th>
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<td>1. Our Faults</td>
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St. Ignatius: “Later, at another time, when much consoled, I thought that I was satisfied, that is, I thought that it was better not to be consoled by God our Lord, if the lack of his visitation was due to my not having disposed myself or helped myself throughout the day, or in giving place to some thoughts that distracted me from his words in the sacrifice [the Mass] and from his divine majesty, and so I thought it would be better not to be consoled in the time of my faults, and that God our Lord orders this (who loves me more than I love myself), for my greater spiritual benefit, so that it is better for me to walk straight, not only in the sacrifice, but throughout the day, in order to be visited.”

Lucia (see Rule 2 above): “So it was truly the grace of God that prompted me to make that phone call, and your words and prayers revealed the truth to me. I realize now more than ever how much God loves me, and how much I need him; and I am more determined than ever to “keep my eyes fixed on Jesus,” to follow him, to serve him, to do his will.”
Person in spiritual direction: “I realize through this desolating experience how powerless I am over my compulsive tendency to work so hard and my great need for God’s strength in this area of weakness. God’s constant love for me is enabling me to see in a deep way how lovable I am. It is helping me to appreciate my own giftedness in working with the homeless.”

A brother, to St. Francis of Assisi: “Pray for me, kind Father, for I am sure that I will be immediately free from my temptations if you will be kind enough to pray for me. For I am afflicted above my strength and I know this is no secret to you. St. Francis said to him: “Believe me, son, for I think you are for that reason more truly a servant of God; and know that the more you are tempted, the more you will be loved by me.” And he added: “I tell you in all truth, no one must consider himself a servant of God until he has undergone temptations and tribulations. Temptation overcome,” he said, “is is in a way a ring with which the Lord espouses the soul of his servant to himself.”

Rule 10

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 a 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 spiritual life…”

St. Bonaventure, of St. Francis of Assisi: “Francis would never let any call of the Spirit go unanswered; when he experienced it, he would make the most of it and enjoy the consolation afforded him in this way for as long as God permitted it. If he was on a journey, and felt the near approach of God’s Spirit, he would stop and let his companions go on, while he drank in the joy of this new inspiration; he refused to offer God’s grace an ineffectual welcome (cf. 2 Cor 6:1).”

Ways of “Taking New Strength”

1. Prayer of petition for strength in future spiritual desolation
2. Meditation on truths that will sustain in spiritual desolation
3. Consideration of the value of spiritual desolation for growth
4. Reflection on past personal growth through spiritual desolation
5. Resolution to make no changes in time of spiritual desolation
6. Review of these Ignatian rules
7. Planning for specific situations of spiritual desolation

Rule 11

Jane: Day 1: Jane begins the retreat in peace, with a quiet expectation of meeting Christ. She reflects, as directed, on chapter 55 of Isaiah and is attracted to verse 1: “All you who are thirsty, come to the water!” and verse 12: “Yes, in joy you shall depart, in peace you shall be brought back.” She is confident that the Lord will nourish and refresh her for her ministry.

Day 2: In praying over the assigned Scripture verse, “Come to me... I will refresh you” (Matt. 11:28), Jane experiences an inner cleansing and refreshment as if she were drawn into a fountain of fire and water. She is filled with wonder and joy. The blissful feeling remains with her throughout the day, and she experiences the nearness of Jesus as she ponders other assigned Scripture readings and listens to what the Lord is saying to her.

Day 3: She arises early the next morning quietly hoping for similar experiences of the Lord. She prays over the assigned section of the Canticle of Canticles and experiences a sweet joy at the thought of the Lord’s love for her. She then decides to prolong her praying periods from an hour to an hour and a half each so as to become more immersed in Christ. She does not inform her director about this plan. She spends seven hours that day in prayer. Her excitement grows. That night she cannot fall asleep.

Day 4: Jane gets up with a bad headache, feeling exhausted and under strain. She cannot pray well. All joy has evaporated. She is tired and sad and moody. Finally in the evening she tells the director about her action of the previous day and its results. The director advises cutting down on prayer time and resting more.

Day 5: She follows the advice, prays less but still has no enthusiasm and is filled with gloom.

Day 6: At her morning prayer she becomes very much disturbed. She begins to doubt the Lord’s presence to her even in the opening days of the retreat. Probably, she thinks, she should attribute everything to her overactive imagination. Who is she to be given a taste of the sweetness of the Lord? She begins to grow discouraged at the thought she is not meant for a deep prayer life. Her desire for God is just an illusion. The rest of the day is one of disquietude, confusion, and a sense of discouragement.

Day 7: The director urges her to trust her earlier experiences and to hope in the Lord that he will bring good even from this desolation. She directs her to pray over John 14, especially the opening verses, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” She prays quietly over the passages, rests more, takes walks in the garden.
Day 8: On the closing day she returns to chapter 55 of Isaiah: “Come to the water... in joy you shall depart.” A calm settles on her mind and spirit. She knows that she is loved by God. She also knows at her deepest level the experience of the second day was genuine. She has become more aware of her weaknesses, especially her undisciplined imagination and her rapidly fluctuating emotions. She prays for light and strength to manage these and become more balanced emotionally. She ends the retreat in quiet gratitude. She looks forward now in hope to her ministry—a more wise and serene woman.

Rule 12

Steve has completed seven years of seminary training and is on the verge of ordination to the diaconate, as preparation for priesthood. He has reached, therefore, the moment of definitive decision for the clerical state of life. His preparation for ordination includes an eight day Ignatian retreat, to be made a few weeks before the ceremony. Steve welcomes the opportunity to pray more deeply as he approaches this key moment in his life and willingly prepares for these days of silence and recollection. Steve is an occasional smoker and, before the retreat, decides to abstain from smoking during the eight days of retreat.

The retreat begins and Steve dedicates himself to the daily rhythm of liturgical prayer with the other seminarians, personal prayer with Scripture, and his personal meeting with the director. He finds the silence helpful and enjoys the setting of natural beauty that surrounds the retreat house. He experiences times of spiritual consolation in prayer and an overall sense of well-being in the retreat.

After supper on the fourth day, Steve finds that he has lost his former sense of peace. He goes for a walk, but a vague interior disquiet persists. Steve decides to smoke a single cigarette and does so. He then goes to his room for his final hour of prayer that evening, unhappy that he has not maintained his resolve to avoid smoking during the retreat. As he begins his prayer, he continues to feel restless and ill at ease.

The prayer is distracted and dry, and Steve, finding it difficult, ends the prayer period after forty-five minutes. He awakens late the next morning and barely arrives in time for Morning Prayer with the other seminarians. He continues with the times of prayer as planned, but finds them empty and burdensome. God seems far away, and Steve becomes increasingly frustrated as he strives to pray. A thought comes to him: “You are about to be ordained a deacon, and you wish to become a priest. Look at you! You can’t even keep a simple resolution not to smoke for eight days. You can’t complete an hour of prayer as planned. You are unable to pray with any fruit at all, after all these years of training. If you can’t even do these simple things, how are you ever going to handle the responsibilities of priesthood for the rest of your life?”

In the early afternoon, Steve meets as usual with the retreat director and openly shares with the director all that he has experienced since the day before. The sharing relieves his frustration and doubts, and the director helps Steve to discern the
spiritual movement at work in him. Steve recovers his peace, continues his retreat with his habitual good will, and, a few weeks later, is ordained a deacon. His ordination is the beginning of a rewarding year of diaconate and leads, later, to a fruitful priesthood.

St. Francis of Assisi: “The saint, therefore, made it a point to keep himself in joy of heart and to preserve the unction of the spirit and the “oil of gladness” [Ps 45:7]. He avoided with the greatest care the miserable illness of dejection, so that if he felt it creeping over his mind even a little, he would have recourse very quickly to prayer. For he would say: “If the servant of God, as may happen, is disturbed in any way, he should rise immediately to pray and should remain in the presence of the heavenly Father until he “restores unto him the joy of salvation” [Ps 51:12].”

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.”
Rule 14

“Jane is in her late thirties. She is an introverted and affectionate personality, having a lively imagination and a wide range of feelings that can be easily moved by idealism and enthusiasm and just as easily downcast by failure and loneliness. She loves Christ and desires to grow in her nearness to God and in service to others. For the past year and a half she has been under spiritual direction and has come to a deepening of her inner life through a daily hour of prayer and times of retreat.”

“Jim has for several years been a member of an active parish. He has gotten along well enough and certainly loves the parish and is enthusiastic about its apostolic work. One serious difficulty, however, showed up along the line; and, despite his goodwill and effort and prayer, this has gotten worse rather than better. He generally feels resentful and distrustful of those in leadership, and frequently his spontaneous first response to any directive or even suggestion from them is rebellious. His efforts to be open and receptive put him under constant tension. Worse yet, he finds that even his attitude toward God is often tinged with fear and distrust. He is disturbed and confused by all this, feels guilty and discouraged about ever growing into a truly Christ-like man.”

Dedicated woman: “What I can see now is that the core of the difficulty was the same old problem — dressed up a bit differently perhaps but still the same — of doubting God’s love for me with all the morass of negativity that brings with it.”

Conclusion

Blessed Pierre Favre: “May it please the divine clemency to give me the grace of clearly remembering and pondering the benefits which the Lord conferred on me in those days through that man. Firstly, He gave me an understanding of my conscience and of the temptations and scruples I had had for so long without either understanding them or seeing the way by which I would be able to get peace.”

John Cassian: “Although the causes of these passions, once they have been set forth by the teachings of the elders, are immediately recognized by all, nonetheless, before they are revealed, though we are all harmed by them and they are present in everyone, no one knows of them.”

Ven. John Henry Newman: “The power of prayer, being a habit, must be acquired, like all other habits, by practice.”