

GUIDELINES FOR MORE SUBTLE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

A Foundation

RULE 1

While the good spirit tends to give joy, peace, and encouragement the evil spirit can raise subtle fears, doubts, or dissatisfaction about the course we're taking.

Causes of Consolation

RULE 2

If we experience a sudden consolation and joyful peace without any apparent cause or reason, it is from God.

RULE 3

When consolation does occur because of a cause, like a thought or an event, it may be from the good spirit trying to strengthen and encourage us, or from the evil spirit trying to distract us or cause us to focus on ourselves.

Questionable Consolation

RULE 4

For one who wants to pursue good, the evil spirit is often disguised as an "angel of light" appearing like the good spirit. Our attention may be shifted to other "good" things and we may eventually become prideful or selfish.

RULE 5

The course of a consolation is likely to be from the good spirit if we find ourselves growing closer to God at the beginning, middle, and end. If, on the other hand, we notice the path of our experience begins as good but slowly becomes corrupted and moves toward selfish thoughts and inclinations (and even desolation), it is likely the evil spirit who has hijacked the consolation.

RULE 6

If we gave in to false consolation and were duped by the evil spirit we must resolve to examine what happened and where we might have been led astray. Then, learning from our mistakes, we should get back on track and move forward.

Being Attentive to Our Feelings

RULE 7

If we're maturing in the spiritual life the good spirit is gentle like a drop of water quietly being absorbed by a sponge while the evil spirit is harsh and disturbing like a drop of water hitting a stone.

RULE 8

When we experience sudden unexplained consolation from God (as in Rule 2) and find a sort of “afterglow” of exhilaration and feeling on fire for God, we can be tempted to make quick and rash decisions. Just as we shouldn’t make important decisions in desolation, we should refrain from making big decisions in the extremes of blinding consolation. Wait until things settle and then engage in a thoughtful discernment before making any major choices.

“...We have to decide whether it is new wine brought by God or an illusion created by the spirit of this world or the spirit of the devil. At other times, the opposite can happen, when the forces of evil induce us not to change, to leave things as they are, to opt for a rigid resistance to change. Yet that would be to block the working of the Spirit. We are free, with the freedom of Christ. Still, he asks us to examine what is within us - our desires, anxieties, fears and questions - and what takes place all around us - ‘the signs of the times’ - and thus to recognize the paths that lead to complete freedom. ‘Test everything; hold fast to what is good’ (1 Thess 5:21).”

(Pope Francis, Gaudete et Exsultate, 168)

“Discernment, then, is not a solipsistic self-analysis or a form of egotistical introspection, but an authentic process of leaving ourselves behind in order to approach the mystery of God, who helps us to carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of our brothers and sisters.”

(Pope Francis, Gaudete et Exsultate, 175)