

## Consolation & Desolation in The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola

### Consolation

I use the word 'consolation' when any interior movement is produced in the soul which leads her to become inflamed with the love of her Creator and Lord, and when as a consequence, there is no creature on the face of the earth that the person can love in itself, but they love it in the Creator and Lord of all things.

Similarly, I use the word 'consolation' when a person sheds tears which lead to the love of our Lord, whether they arise from grief over sins or over the passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other reasons immediately directed towards his service and praise.

Lastly, I give the name 'consolation' to every increase of hope, faith, and charity, to all interior happiness which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, leaving the soul quiet and at peace in her Creator and Lord.  
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*We see that consolation is the connection with and orientation to God in a profound way. It is found in feelings of greater love, joy, hope, etc., but also in the more uncomfortable feelings that arise out of repentance or compassion.*

## Desolation

*When, by contrast, we are choosing or acting contrary to consolation, there will have an opposite spiritual and emotional response, which Ignatius terms 'desolation'.*

'Desolation' is the name I give to everything contrary to what is described [as consolation]; for example, darkness and disturbance in the soul, attraction to what is low and of the earth, disquiet arising from various agitations and temptations. All this leads to a lack of confidence in which one feels oneself to be without hope and without love. One finds oneself thoroughly lazy, lukewarm, sad and as though cut off from one's Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way, the thoughts that spring from consolation are contrary to the thoughts that spring from desolation. [317]

*Quotes from 'The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola' translated by Michael Ivens SJ (Gracewing, 2004)*

## Wisdom in how to respond to awareness of Consolation and Desolation

### In Consolation

- Rejoice in feeling close to God and gather strength from this for future desolations.
- Recognise things that seek to draw you away from God and remain humble; don't let the enjoyment of closeness to God go to your head. Act with courage and firmness against temptations, being open, not secretive, about them, learning about your strengths and weaknesses as you notice them.

### In Desolation

- Don't make major life-changing decisions; don't go back on a decision made in consolation.
- Seek to act gently and firmly against the desolation. If not inclined to pray – pray; if feeling indolent and reluctant to exercise, take some exercise, etc.
- Seek to trust yourself to God's care. You are still dearly loved and held by him.
- Look for the cause of the desolation. Might it be:
  - ◊ Spiritual negligence? If so, address this.
  - ◊ God drawing you into new aspects of faith that you are reluctant to face? If so, seek to face your fears.
  - ◊ God reminding you of your need for grace? (cf. 2 Cor. 2.7 - Paul's 'thorn in the flesh'). If so, seek to accept your vulnerability and dependency.

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