



Discover Ignatian Spirituality

Week 6

Making Good Decisions

Previously we looked at the idea of consolation and desolation, movements that take us towards God and those that take us away from God. Those movements are at the heart of discernment and decision making.

Every day we might make many 'micro-decisions' as outlined in the Rob Marsh article we shared in week two, however St Ignatius also gives us wisdom related to bigger choices we make in life.

Some important presumptions:

- The choices should be well motivated, good in themselves, in each step of implementation, and would be good for all concerned in their outcomes.
- You are the one making this decision, and you are not deciding during a time of desolation
- You are as interiorly free as I can be for now
- You have gathered information to help towards making a responsible decision. Including asking people who know you well and who you trust for their view
- You are clear on what the decision is that is within your gift – so you can decide to put yourself forward for a job but you can't decide to get the job, that decision sits with someone else

To engage with the Ignatian teaching on decision-making, there should be:

- An openness to the work of the Holy Spirit
- Some knowledge and ability with regard to discernment of spirits, so that we can prayerfully feel our way towards God
- A sincere desire to seek – as best we can – the greater glory of God in the decision we are making
- A willingness to put in the effort, because our decision-making is always a collaborative exercise with God.

Given all of the above you might want to set aside some time to pray over the decision:

1. In God's Presence

I place myself in God's presence and pray for the freedom to understand and choose what is most in harmony with who I am as God's beloved and with God's will for me at this point in my life.

2. How am I as I set about making this decision?

A) I have a deep instinct about the decision and feel that I already know what I will do. St Ignatius calls this the first time of making a decision.

B) I am pulled in different directions and feel conflicting emotions. St Ignatius calls this the second time.

I use 'discernment of spirits' - working with consolation and desolation. I explore what might be behind my feelings, which spirits are moving me? Where do I feel I am being invited and where do I feel I am being driven?

Which feelings, if followed, would enhance my humanity and that of others, and lead to greater wholeness, happiness, generosity etc. for myself and for others, and which ones, if followed, would lead to the opposite?

This may take a longish period of time, and it can include the use of the imagination, images etc.

C) If you have no strong feelings one way or another, but still need to make a decision this is what St Ignatius referred to as the third time for making a decision.

Prayerfully fill in the four columns – looking at the pros and cons of one. If the choice does not stand out clearly when using the four column exercise, look over the advantages and disadvantages of the options and weigh them from the viewpoint of:

- those reasons which more evidently lead towards God and not away
- consistency with my own graced history, how God has led me so far
- a realistic appraisal of my own gifts and my essential needs at this time

3. Accompaniment can be helpful

If you have a spiritual director, bring the discernment process to them, or you might be able to get someone to see you for a short amount of time to help you with a particular decision. You want someone who can help you discern rather than a friend who might offer advice. The sense of what is the right decision grows over time and is confirmed by others, by the right doors opening etc.

4. 'Testing' the Decision

You can do one or more of the following:

- Offer the decision to God in prayer
- Live with it for some days, and notice the impact that has on you
- Live with the opposite decision for some days, noticing the same – is there a difference in the impact of the two choices
- If the decision feels like the best you can make at this time, given the information available, ask God for the grace of confirmation

You may use one or more of the following.

- Imagine someone asking your advice on this decision: How would you advise them, and why?
- Imagine you are on your deathbed. Looking back from that vantage point, would you be comfortable with the decision as the best you could have made?
- Imagine you are before Jesus at the Last Judgement. What would you like to hear him say about your decision?

The third time of making a decision:

Pros of choice A	Cons of choice A	Pros of choice B	Cons of Choice B