

IDI Summer Curriculum—Session I (June 21-26, 2026)
“The Fourteen Rules” **Rev. Timothy Gallagher, OMV**

From *Thinking Like a Saint: Discernment of Spirits in the Catholic Tradition* (2026)

Taking New Strength for That Time

This thinking is directed toward “taking new strength” to resist when desolation returns. Some suggestions follow:

1. Prayer of Petition for Strength in Future Spiritual Desolation

In rule 6, Ignatius encourages such prayer in time of desolation. We need not wait, however, for desolation to pray in this manner. In days of spiritual consolation, we can ask for this strength in future desolation. Such prayer will be easier because of the consolation that accompanies it.

2. Meditation on Truths that Will Sustain Us in Future Spiritual Desolation

In the same rule 6, Ignatius counseled this, too, for one in desolation. Again, we need not wait for desolation to meditate in this way. In the peace of spiritual consolation, we may reflect on, ponder, meditate on truths of faith, scriptural verses, memories of God’s fidelity in past desolation, and the like. If we do, we will find these more readily at our spiritual fingertips when we need them in desolation.

3. Practice Ongoing Spiritual Awareness

Again, in rule 6, Ignatius calls us to “much examination.” Such examination will be much easier if, in time of spiritual consolation, we practice this examination regularly. In days of peaceful consolation, pray the examen prayer. If journaling assists your examen, consider this as well. Choose one or more persons with whom you can speak about spiritual experience. We will return to this when we explore rule 10.

4. Practice Ignatius's Suitable Penance

Ignatius also recommends suitable penance in time of spiritual desolation. This, too, will be easier if we do this in time of spiritual consolation. If, for example, your tendency in time of desolation is to turn to food, to time on the smartphone or tablet, to computer games, or other diversions, then, in days of consolation, practice limiting your use of these. The consolation you are experiencing will make this easier to accomplish, it will be healthy in itself, and it will ready you to employ such suitable penance in time of desolation.

5. Consideration of the Value of Spiritual Desolation for Growth

On a day of spiritual consolation, we may reflect on rules 7 (God permits the trial of desolation so that we may resist and grow in the ability to resist) and 9 (three fruits that God wishes to give in permitting desolation). Such consideration will render the struggle against desolation less difficult when it recurs.

6. Reflection on Past Personal Growth through Spiritual Desolation

In any of the settings mentioned, in prayer, reflection, or with another person, consideration of past experiences of desolation and how God gave growth through them, renders it easier to trust that future desolation, too, will lie within God's providence and that he offers further growth through it.

7. Resolution to Make no Changes in Time of Spiritual Desolation

When in spiritual consolation, recall times when you did make changes to your spiritual proposals in desolation. See clearly that these changes were not good. Let these memories instill in you a determination to avoid such changes in future desolation. Through this practice, the earlier changes are, in a sense, redeemed, and now help to avoid similar changes in the future.

8. *Review of These Ignatian Rules*

One exposure to these rules is not enough. Reading the book is not enough. Choose a way of reviewing the rules, of keeping them fresh in your awareness and so at hand when you need them. Create a summary of them and place it where you will see it often. Memorize a shortened form of the rules. Read about them periodically. Listen to podcasts about the rules. Talk about them with others. Create digital ways of refreshing the rules. I beg of you: take ten minutes today, or if not today, soon, to choose your way of reviewing the rules. A day will come when you will remember those ten minutes with gratitude.

9. *Plan for Specific Situations of Spiritual Desolation*

If you know that a certain situation renders you vulnerable to spiritual desolation, all the more if this situation repeats, prepare ahead for it. What is that situation? When does it arise? In time of spiritual consolation, think of how you will respond when this situation returns. Prepare helpful ways of resisting when it does.