

awareness examen

noticing god in the sacred ordinary



Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1539 as a Catholic order to train men in theology and equip them for mission. In order to train his followers, Ignatius wrote the *Spiritual Exercises*, a series of meditations and prayers designed to be carried out over 30 days. Central to these exercises was the awareness examen, a way of paying attention to consolation and desolation.

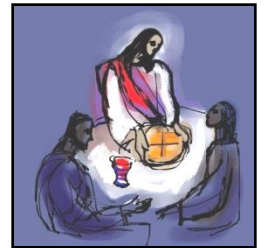
Consolations are described as moments of peace and deep well-being “when we find ourselves so on fire with the love of God that we can freely give ourselves over to God and there is no competition with any human person or any created thing” (Ignatius, ¶316). This is not necessarily the same as happiness for we may experience sorrow in these moments—e.g. during repentance. “More simply said, consolation can be identified with any increase of our faith, our hope, and our love” (Ignatius, ¶316).

Desolations refer to times “when we find ourselves enmeshed in a certain turmoil of spirit or feel ourselves weighed down by a heavy darkness or weight” (Ignatius, ¶317). These are moments of inner discomfort and dis-ease, resulting in a disconnection from God and his creation.

The awareness examen is a simple practice to help us pay attention to God speaking through our consolations and desolations. We do this by prayerfully reflecting on two questions at the end of each day:

- ◆ For what moment today am I most grateful (consolations)?
- ◆ For what moment today am I least grateful (desolations)?

By asking these questions, we become “aware of moments that at first we might easily pass by as insignificant, moments that ultimately can give us direction for our lives... Insignificant moments when looked at each day become significant because they form a pattern that often points the way to how God wants to give us more life” (Linn).



Practically speaking, take 10-15 minutes each day to prayerfully reflect on your day, noticing first moments of consolation and then moments of desolation. Journal about these reflections. After 30 days, take some time to look for **patterns** and ways in which God most often gets your attention. Where is God drawing you in your inner life and the world around you? The will of God is generally for us to do more of whatever we are most grateful for. However, “the sign that you are listening well to the interior presence of God is... if you are led to think and act more like Jesus” (Linn).

As we gain practice in reflecting on our joys and sorrows, we can assess their significance and recognize patterns and trends... For God is working in us, shaping us through our joys and sorrows. But we cannot respond to the inner work of God unless we learn to stop, be silent, pray, think and reflect on this inner work... (Gordon Smith)