

ADVICE FOR MAKING GOOD DECISIONS BY ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Paraphrased from the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*

St. Ignatius introduces his section in *The Spiritual Exercises* regarding “The Making of an Election” (or choice) by saying, “I ought to focus on only the purpose for which I am created, to praise God our Lord and to save my soul. Accordingly, anything whatsoever that I elect ought to be chosen as an aid toward that end.”

He speaks of how a person should not first seek something of the world, and then seek God, thus dragging the end into subjection to the means. For instance, a person should not first decide that he or she must marry and then figure out how to serve God in marriage, or seek a certain job, and then serve God in that job. “Thus these persons do not go directly to God, but desire God to come directly to their disordered attachments.” By disordered, St. Ignatius means that the attachments are a person’s priority over God’s will. (From “Introduction to the Making of an Election” #169)

St. Ignatius also makes the point that “all the matters about which we wish to make an election should in themselves be either indifferent or good, so that they function constructively within our Holy Mother the hierarchical Church, and are not bad or opposed to her.”

Some matters, says St. Ignatius, such as marriage, or priesthood, or the like, fall under a category of unchangeable. In these cases he states that there is nothing further to elect, even if the original choice wasn’t divinely inspired, because the choice cannot be undone. In St. Ignatius’ opinion, “the only thing that can be considered is to repent and then explore how to lead a good life within the decision made. (Of course, nowadays many annulments of marriage are accorded by the Church, but it is good to strive to honor vows made before God.) (From “To Acquire Knowledge of the Matters about Which an Election Should Be Made #’s 170-172)

THERE ARE THREE SUITABLE TIMES FOR MAKING A GOOD, SOUND CHOICE:

The first time is an occasion when the Lord moves or attracts the will in such a way that a devout person without doubting or having the ability to doubt carries out what God has proposed. This happened to St. Paul.

The second time is when sufficient clarity is received through the experience of consolations and desolations, and the discernment of various spirits.

The third time is during a period of tranquility, when the soul is not being moved one way and the other by different spirits and uses its natural faculties in freedom and peace. (#’s 175-177)

“IF THE CHOICE IS NOT MADE IN THE FIRST OR SECOND TIME, TWO METHODS ARE GIVEN BELOW FOR MAKING IT IN THIS THIRD TIME” (#178)

THE FIRST METHOD OF MAKING A GOOD, SOUND CHOICE:

St. Ignatius says to try to become indifferent, neither more inclined or emotionally disposed toward one choice or another. Instead, place yourself in the middle, like the pointer of a balance. Beg God to move your will and put into your mind, by reasoning well with your intellect, what you ought to do so that it will be more to His praise and glory.

List the advantages, (all of them for the praise of God and salvation of your soul), that there are in making a certain choice, and then list the disadvantages and dangers there in making it. Then consider the advantages and benefits in not making the choice, and the disadvantages and dangers in not making it.

This can be charted as follows:

MAKING A CERTAIN CHOICE	NOT MAKING A CERTAIN CHOICE
Positive reasons:	Positive reasons:
Negative reasons:	Negative reasons:

Notice to which side your reason more inclines. Then when a decision has been made, pray before God, offer Him your choice, and ask Him to confirm it, if it is conducive to His greater service and praise. (#'s 179-183)

THE SECOND METHOD OF MAKING A GOOD, SOUND CHOICE

1. The First Rule. Be sure that the love you have for the choices before you is solely for the sake of our Creator and Lord.
2. The Second Rule. Imagining a person, a stranger, in your same situation, consider what you would say to him or her, in order to bring that person to act and elect for the greater glory of God and the perfection of his or her soul. Then apply the advice you would give to that person to yourself.
3. The Third Rule. Consider, as if you were at the point of death, what procedure or norm you would wish you had used to make your decision. Then use that norm to guide your choice.
4. The Fourth Rule. Imagining your condition on judgment day, think of what you would wish you had decided regarding the present matter. Apply that decision now, so that on that day, you will have complete contentment and joy.
5. Note: When the decision has been made, offer it in prayer to God, and beg His Divine Majesty to receive and confirm it, provided it is conducive to His greater service and praise. (#'s 184-188)