

Anne

Does the Second Set of Rules apply here? If so, why? If they do apply, how might you as spiritual director apply these rules to help Anne?

Anne is a twenty-nine-year-old single woman. She has an undergraduate degree in business, and has worked successfully in an accounting firm for the past several years. Anne recently returned to school to earn a graduate degree as well, and is now a full-time university student. She is in the fall semester of her first of two years of studies toward this end.

Faith was very real for Anne from an early age. For a time in high school and in her first years of college, Anne thought less about her faith, but this period passed and, for the past ten years, God has been very much at the center of her life. Some years ago, Anne began to spend an hour each morning in quiet prayer, and to attend daily Mass on her lunch hour. As time passed, Anne's prayer gradually deepened and simplified; the regular spiritual direction she sought assisted her greatly in this growth.

In these same years, Anne also became active in her parish. She joined the lay associates of a community of religious women in her city, and dedicated time on weekends and in the summers to share in their service of the poor. Anne grew close to these religious women, and came to esteem them and their work highly.

Anne also sought ways to live her faith actively in the secularized atmosphere of the university. She formed a group of students which met weekly to discuss issues of faith, and was pleased to find the group increasingly well attended. Anne noted with quiet joy that several of the participants began to think about God in a new way.

When she returned to studies after her years in the business world, Anne found that the question of her calling in life came insistently to the fore. She asked God in prayer to see clearly how she was to serve in life. A desire grew within her to respond totally, and without reservation, to the God whose love she knew so deeply.

One day Anne was speaking with a member of the religious community whose ministry she shared as an associate. This woman, seeing Anne's evident love for service to the poor, suggested that she investigate the community's volunteer program of ministry to the poor. This would involve, the woman explained, two years of living with and working among the poor in a third world country. Anne was drawn to this possibility, and wondered whether God might be speaking to her through this woman. Anne also knew that this program might help her to answer a question that was increasingly present in her thoughts: whether God might be calling her to join this religious community and dedicate her life to its work.

When Anne discussed this with her spiritual director, the director suggested that Anne consider making the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises in daily life; this would offer her a prayerful means of seeking light from God. Anne was very willing and began the retreat process.

The First Week meditations deepened Anne's awareness of the Lord as her Redeemer and Healer. When she entered the prayer of the Second Week, Anne felt a strong desire to respond to the call of the eternal King; her heart was profoundly drawn to the poverty and humility of Christ, and the thought of sharing in his dedication to the poor gave her joy.

One afternoon, Anne was walking home from class thinking about the call of the eternal King and what this might mean in her life. As she did, she felt herself enveloped in the love of the Lord. Her heart lifted in great joy to the God whose closeness and love she felt so deeply. In that blessed experience of God's infinite love, Anne felt that she knew, with great clarity, that God was calling her to serve in the volunteer program. The warmth of that grace-filled experience of grace remained with Anne for several days. In her next meeting with her director, she described this time of joy and clarity.

Several days later, as her Spiritual Exercises continued, Anne prayed with the text of the beatitudes. As she reflected on the first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3), Anne again felt joy at the thought of her call to serve the poor in the third world. As she prayed in the next weeks, Anne continued to experience this same joy-filled desire to serve the poor. She shared these experiences too with her director; it seemed very clear that God was calling her to join the volunteer program when new candidates would be accepted in late spring.

A few weeks later, Anne prayed with the Gospel account of the sending of the twelve (Mt 10:1-16). She was struck by Jesus' call to proclaim the Gospel among the "lost sheep" of the people of God. Her thoughts turned to the students in the university who so frequently seemed lonely and confused, without community, without faith, and without clear meaning in life. Anne reflected on the spiritual assistance that the weekly group was providing for a growing number of students, and the spiritual good that could be accomplished if she continued to lead this group. As she thought of these things, Anne felt a deep joy and peace in God. A warm desire to heed the Gospel call of Jesus, and to serve these "lost sheep," stirred in her heart.

Anne knew that it would be difficult to renounce the volunteer program and the joy of life together with the other religious and volunteers; it would also be difficult to delay or perhaps relinquish altogether the service of the poor she so loved. She was very aware that life on the secularized campus would be more demanding by comparison. The twinge of uneasiness that mingled with her thoughts did not alter the joy Anne felt at the prospect of serving God among the university students. She knew that Jesus himself never chose the easier way, and her one desire was to be totally available to God's call, regardless of the sacrifice involved. In the following days, Anne considered her next meeting with her director and how she would share her new conviction that God was calling her to ministry among the students. Anne also contemplated the concrete steps which she would take in coming months to prepare for this ministry.

Ruth

Does the Second Set of Rules apply here? If not, why not? How would a spiritual director help Ruth? If these rules do apply, when and how do they apply? How would you as a spiritual director help Ruth with them?

Ruth is a married woman in her early fifties whose faith has always been central in her life. Her children are grown and live independently; Ruth teaches three days a week at a local high school.

Ruth has always been drawn to prayer and, for many years, has dedicated such time to prayer as her commitments have allowed. Ten years ago, Ruth took part in a retreat organized by her parish. She spoke that day with the retreat director about her prayer and that conversation proved a spiritual turning point for Ruth; it helped her understand her own spiritual desires at a point in life when time for prayer was gradually becoming more available. Not long after, Ruth and her husband began to attend daily Mass together. They found this practice a source of spiritual strength in their married life and, gradually, it became an important part of their relationship with each other and with God.

Ruth returned periodically to speak with the retreat director and eventually asked for ongoing spiritual direction. The opportunity to speak about her prayer and the helpful suggestions of the director fostered continuing spiritual growth in Ruth. She joined a Bible study group in the parish, and began to pray daily with the Scriptures.

Ruth's spiritual richness and her capacity for friendship often led others to seek her assistance; her sensitive accompaniment blessed many in their times of struggle. When Ruth's youngest child left for college, her director, aware of Ruth's human and spiritual gifts, asked whether she might consider serving as a spiritual director in the future. Ruth was drawn to this idea and discussed it with her husband. With his warm encouragement, she enrolled in a local program for the training of spiritual directors.

The weekly meetings, the assigned readings, and the instruction that Ruth received in the five years of the program deepened her knowledge and love for the spiritual life. Her daily prayer was often blessed with a consoling awareness of the God she loved, and her increased ability to assist others spiritually was a source of joy for Ruth. Others began to ask her for monthly spiritual direction and Ruth accepted five such requests.

When the leader of the Bible study group moved to another city, the other members asked Ruth to be their new leader. Ruth agreed and found that she loved this further stimulus to learn about the Word of God. Her daily prayer with Scripture grew richer, and her awareness of God's love deepened correspondingly. Ruth's marriage and relationships with her children were blessed by the spiritual transformation gradually taking place within her.

One day, as she prayed, Ruth gratefully recalled the spiritual assistance she had received from others over the years, and how much this assistance had contributed to her spiritual growth. As she reflected, a warm sense of God's faithful love filled her heart, and Ruth wondered whether such aid might be offered also to others in the parish. More concretely, Ruth asked herself whether

she should speak with the pastor and offer to establish a spiritual development committee in the parish. As she contemplated taking this initiative, Ruth felt a deep spiritual peace; the work of such a committee would bless many in the parish, and the thought of serving others in this way gave joy to her heart in God.

Ruth shared these thoughts with her husband and with her spiritual director, both of whom encouraged her to speak with the pastor. When she met with him, the pastor welcomed Ruth's proposal and asked her to lead the new committee. Ruth gladly accepted.

That summer Ruth asked several others to assist in forming the spiritual development committee; when September arrived, the group held its first meeting. The committee discussed various projects and then began its work. The meeting and the projects chosen were spiritually energizing for Ruth.

The committee planned a series of evening talks for Advent that year and a parish mission for Lent in March of the following year. Ruth worked diligently to find gifted speakers for the Advent series and to promote the evenings. Though her days grew very full, Ruth loved this new service to the parish. The evenings were well attended and spiritually fruitful for those who participated in them. The series was a source of joy for Ruth.

Preparations for the Lenten mission in March required significant time and effort: contacting a preacher, arranging for publicity, preparing the liturgies, organizing volunteers, and numerous other details. Ruth's energies were stretched in a new way during the months of preparation. She continued her daily prayer as before, but often was distracted by the work that awaited her. Frequently, Ruth came to prayer more tired than she would have liked.

The Lenten mission proved a great blessing for the many parishioners who attended. Many of these expressed their gratitude to Ruth for the new spiritual life she was fostering in the parish. The pastor also thanked Ruth and her committee, and asked them to plan a similar mission for the following year. The mission also awakened a desire for further spiritual initiatives in the parish: a mothers' group, prayer breakfasts, and Eucharistic adoration. In its meetings that spring, the committee considered how it might respond to these requests in the coming months.

Ruth welcomed the new spiritual energy in the parish, and was grateful to God for the fruitfulness of the committee's endeavors; with the others, she planned the activities of the coming pastoral year. At the same time, however, Ruth's own relationship with God seemed to have lost something of its former richness. God now felt more distant, and Ruth was occasionally too tired to pray with Scripture. Her sharing with her husband also seemed less frequent and less rich than before. When one of her children noticed and commented on this, Ruth did not welcome the observation and the conversation became tense. Both felt a little less free in their relationship after that day.

As the months passed, Ruth began to postpone or omit altogether her times of prayer; she felt less desire now for a prayer that had become so dry and distracted. Ruth was further troubled to realize that she had grown weary of the seemingly endless requests for her time and help. She wondered how she had lost the delight in prayer and joy in apostolic involvement that she had formerly felt. Her sense of interior burden deepened as one intensely occupied week followed another.

Summer was approaching, and the new pastoral year was now only a few months away. Ruth knew that she could not face a new year with this weight in her heart, and decided to discuss her spiritual condition openly with her director. She met with the director and described her spiritual emptiness and confusion.

Philip

You are Philip's spiritual director, helping him in this retreat. He shares the following with you. How will you help him? Can St. Ignatius's rules for discernment help here?

Philip is a fifty-two-year-old married man deeply dedicated to Christ. For many years he has sought to love God and his family, and to witness faithfully to the Lord in the workplace. Over these same years Philip has developed a deep life of prayer and a growing closeness to God. His life is full and, in the vicissitudes of daily living, Philip experiences a profoundly rooted sense of God's love.

One year ago, Philip was reflecting on God's great goodness to him throughout his life. As he prayed, Philip was moved by a profound sense of gratitude, and a desire to respond more fully to that love arose in his heart. For some years he had felt drawn to serve as deacon in the Church; in his prayer that day, Philip wondered whether the Lord might indeed be calling him to this new gift of self in service. In the following weeks Philip discussed this calling with his wife and children, all of whom supported his interest in the diaconate. Philip then spoke with his pastor who likewise encouraged him, and suggested that Philip consider making a retreat to discern this call more fully. Philip welcomed the suggestion and planned to do so when work would allow.

That summer Philip made his retreat at a local retreat house near the sea. He willingly prayed with the Scriptures proposed by the director, and found the days blessed with a warm sense of God's closeness.

On the fifth day, Philip went out walking along the shore. After a time, he sat by the water, thinking of nothing in particular, simply watching the gulls and the waves. Suddenly, he felt the presence of God in a powerful and almost overwhelming way, a way he had never known before. Philip was absolutely sure that the experience was from God; every inch of his being knew it. The certainty brought with it a great sense of awe, and he broke into tears. Philip had never felt so totally loved by God. The experience was so profound that his tears continued often throughout the day and again when he spoke with his director that evening.

The warmth of that grace-filled experience by the sea remained with Philip during the next days of retreat, and he continued to reflect upon that great gift of love. Philip perceived that something new had entered his relationship with God through that experience. He sensed that this new manifestation of God's love was also an invitation to show his own love in a new way. It seemed evident that this new response of love must be the call to the diaconate that he was even then discerning in the retreat. With joy in his heart, Philip understood that his discernment was complete; he now knew that God was indeed calling him to serve as deacon. Philip looked forward to sharing this new-found clarity with his director that evening.