

Synoptic Gospels NT 203
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Excerpt from the *Autobiography of St. Ignatius*:
Discerning Two Directions in the Heart

(In 1521, the 30-year-old Ignatius was recovering from a serious leg fracture suffered in the battle of Pamplona with the French. During his convalescence he spent much of his time reading in bed.)

... In everything else he was quite well, but he was not able to stand upon that leg, so had to remain in bed. He had been much given to reading worldly books of fiction and knight errantry, and feeling well enough to read, he asked for some of these books to help while away the time. In that house, however, they could find none of those he was accustomed to read, and so they gave him a Life of Christ and a book of the Lives of the Saints in Spanish.

6. By frequent reading of these books, he conceived some affection for what he found there narrated. Pausing in his reading, he gave himself up to thinking over what he had read. At other times he dwelt on the things of the world which formerly had occupied his thoughts. Of the many vain things that presented themselves to him, one took such possession of his heart that without realizing it, he could spend two, three or even four hours on end thinking of it, fancying what he would have to do in the service of a certain lady, of the means he would take to reach the country where she was living, of the verses, the promises he would make her, the deeds of gallantry he would do in her service. He was so enamored with all this that he did not see how impossible it would all be, because the lady was of no ordinary rank; neither countess, nor duchess, but of a nobility much higher than any of these.

7. Nevertheless, our Lord came to his assistance, for He saw to it that these thoughts were succeeded by others which sprang from the things he was reading. In reading the Life of our Lord and the Lives of the Saints, he paused to think and reason with himself. "Suppose that I should do what St. Francis did, what St. Dominic did?" He thus let his thoughts run over many things that seemed good to him, always putting before himself things that were difficult and important which seemed to him easy to accomplish when he proposed them. But all his thought

was to tell himself, “St. Dominic did this, therefore, I must do it. St. Francis did this; therefore, I must do it.” These thoughts also lasted a good while. And then other things taking their place, the

worldly thoughts above mentioned came upon him and remained a long time with him. This succession of diverse thoughts was of long duration, and they were either of worldly achievements which he desired to accomplish, or those of God which took hold of his imagination to such an extent that worn out with the struggle, he turned them all aside and gave his attention to other things.

8 There was, however, this difference. When he was thinking of the things of the world, he was filled with delight, but when afterwards he dismissed them from weariness, he was dry and dissatisfied. And when he thought of going barefoot to Jerusalem and of eating nothing but herbs and performing the other rigors he saw that the saints had performed, he was consoled, not only when he entertained these thoughts, but even after dismissing them, he remained cheerful and satisfied.

But he paid no attention to this, nor did he stop to weigh the difference until one day his eyes were opened a little, and he began to wonder at the difference and to reflect on it, learning from experience that one kind of thoughts left him sad and the other cheerful. Thus, step by step, he came to recognize the difference between the two spirits that moved him, the one being from the evil spirit, the other from God.

9. He acquired no little light from this reading and began to think more seriously of his past life and the great need he had of doing penance for it.

From *St. Ignatius' Own Story*, as told to Luis Gonzalez de Camara. Translated by William J. Young, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1956.) pp. 9-10.