



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Spiritual Essays

Center for Ignatian Spirituality

2008

Rules and Ideals

Fr. Randy Roche

Loyola Marymount University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Roche, Fr. Randy, "Rules and Ideals" (2008). *Spiritual Essays*. 17.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays/17>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritual Essays by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

Rules and Ideals

When the pope came to the U.S. recently, some in the media expected that he would criticize Catholics for doctrinal errors and issue judgments about the American way of life. What we saw, read, or heard was all positive: encouragement, and challenge to live up to ideals, rather than a corrective to the breaking of rules. As Jesus said: “. . . I have come, not to condemn the world, but to save the world.” (Jn 12:47)

The rules of the Church that the pope represents are formulated according to the system of Roman law, which has a different emphasis from the type of law that Americans have inherited from England. Roman law states an ideal, and presumes that good-willed adults will make appropriate judgments about particular applications; American law tends to represent rules in an absolute manner, allowing for no exceptions or interpretations.

Most of us, as adults, do not experience our spirituality in the same way as we did when we were children. Though we are always in a learning mode, we are no longer satisfied with what was once a rather simple way to make decisions: being told by parents or authorities that “this is right, and that is wrong.” Having come to some awareness that God loves us, as do others in our lives, we want to love back. We can show love by obeying rules, but that is not enough. The appropriate and more attractive way to live our spirituality is by responding with increasing readiness and frequency to the inspirations given us by God: movements that are always in accord with the ideals held in our hearts.

It is not easier to live more by the spirit than by law, to remain open to change rather than to remain in a fixed state of being, to constantly seek causes for gratitude than to identify and condemn the negative. A life of responding to challenges according to one’s inspirations and commitments is, as many tell us, “hard!” But life is of little value if most of our thinking and energy are directed towards maintaining us in familiar surroundings and interactions. Love cannot sit still, but must actively respond to both pleasant and unpleasant realities.

Childhood spirituality can serve as a complement to our adult life in the spirit when we move from ideals to practices. We might, for example, see poverty as a grievous problem from a perspective of ideals, but a specific impulse to stop and greet a homeless person is an occasion for deciding what is, in the particular circumstances, “right

or wrong” for us. The choice is ours. As we grow in awareness, and become adept at recognizing and acting on gracious insights, we exercise our spirituality in both the predictable and the unpredictable moments of our lives.

We often meet challenges to our ideals by following rules, but only those existing rules that we have found by experience to be helpful, or rules that we create for ourselves after reflecting on our experiences. We will not experience God’s inspirations if we rely primarily on popular cultural norms, especially those that ultimately are selfish. Though we might often experience positive impulses to take care of our health, treat ourselves with respect, and speak our truth to others rather than become the ground upon which they walk, much of our inspired thinking and acting will lead us outside of ourselves, to interact positively with others. And, at times, our hearts will incline directly towards God.

The Holy Spirit moves in our hearts at the moment of every decision we make, most often guiding rather than commanding, so that we might properly integrate rules and ideals.