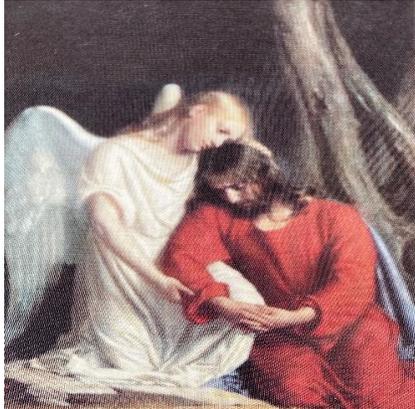


## *St. Ignatius' Teachings on Desolation and Consolation*



**By: Dr. Adriane Gullotta-Gsell**

I pray all of you are well and sustaining your peace in this most trying time of isolation. I am providing much teletherapy from my home because the stress and burdens caused by the COVID19 virus, social distancing, as well as life disruption have triggered unprecedented levels of anxiety and depression within many people. Unfortunately, extreme grief is also pronounced because many have had a loved one or friend who has succumbed to this terrible virus. People are also grieving their normal in-person connection with others and life as they knew it. What previously was a time of prosperity has morphed into an unprecedented time of worldwide suffering.

Even though we are in the Easter Season, what are you personally experiencing and feeling during this period of world agony? What do you find yourself saying to God? What is God saying to you?

In prayer, the Lord led me to St. Ignatius' teachings on desolation and consolation. Spiritual director Margaret Slif and others describe desolation as negativity toward self and others, discouragement, hopelessness, depletion of strength and energy, an all-encompassing sense of doom, and a loss of the personal journey that one has had with the Lord. Consolation is described as the opposite. Instead of focusing only on ourselves and on our own pain and suffering, we can attend to others and their needs. We are able to recognize the blessings, positive things and even sorrow in our lives in perspective. Our relationship with the Lord has been renewed and is no longer dry and seemingly empty.

With thoughts of all those suffering in the world due to this pandemic, during meditation I found myself being led by the Lord to his agony and crucifixion. Jesus, himself, experienced desolation in the garden and during Calvary. He cried out on the cross, "Father, why have you abandoned me?" I immediately discerned that his loving mercy led me to envision these mental images in order to liken all those who are hurting in the world to Christ's personal suffering.

His severe anxiety in the garden, painful scourging, carrying the heavy cross, meeting his heartbroken mother, crucifixion, and death are images that led me to tears. I found myself at the foot of the cross looking up and into his eyes saying, “Lord, I am so sorry. What can I do to help you?” Then I turned to my right and saw our Lady sobbing deeply and losing her footing. I ran to her and found myself holding her up and crying along with her.

How can we comfort and help Jesus and Mary during their period of desolation? We can comfort, love, support, and try to hold up those around us during this world crisis and afterwards. Jesus said, “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me.” (Matthew 25: 31-46) Thank you, Lord, for giving us the chance to help you by helping others! Show us how to care for others responsibly too!



Dr. Adriane Gullotta-Gsell is a licensed psychologist in Red Bank, NJ and has been in the field of counseling psychology for over 37 years. Dr. Adriane has a Ph.D. and MS from Fordham University, and an MA in Theology from Georgian Court University. She is married for 42 years, has two married daughters, and three precious grandchildren.