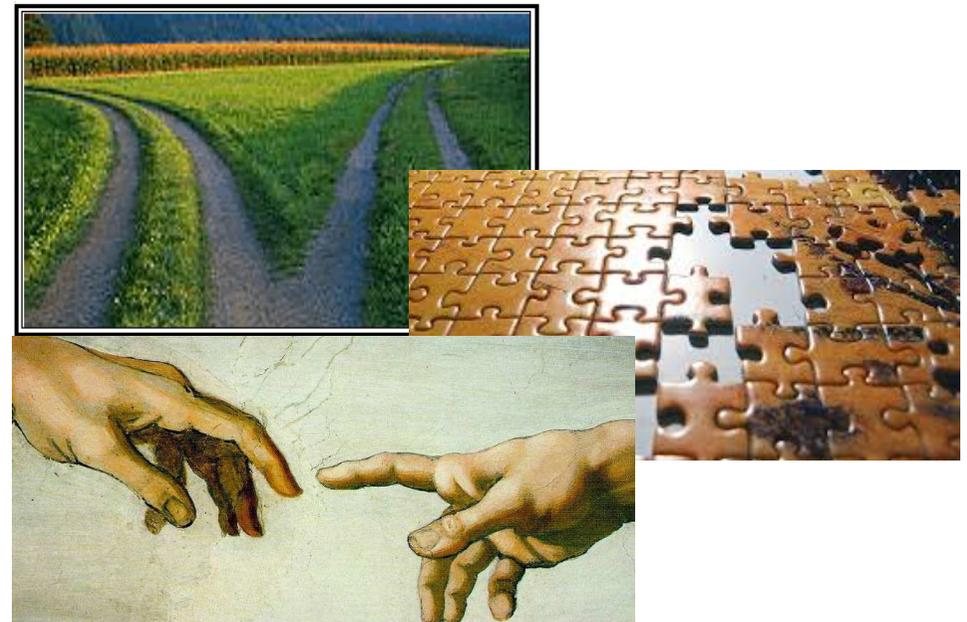


Things to Consider

- ▶ From a biblical perspective, as we seek to discern a particular issue, we find ourselves in a 'time-between' period, waiting between Good Friday and Easter Day; in fact Holy Saturday. The issue before us is as yet unresolved. Resurrection has not yet occurred.
- ▶ In the last brochure, we saw a method of discernment developed by St Ignatius of Loyola. What else can we do in conjunction with it?
- ▶ As Christians living out our Faith, we are not simply individuals living in isolation from one another; we are part of the 'community of faith' we name Church. This means we have our scriptures passed down from one generation to the next. We also have a long and rich tradition of discernment down through the centuries that draws from those scriptures, and we have our fellow Christians who with us make up the Church of today.
- ▶ In any situation needing discernment, it is never simply me alone needing to bear this decision. That would bow to the individualism of our secular Western world, whereas through our baptism we are part of a community of faith.
- ▶ So, we turn to **our scriptures** and ask ourselves, is there anything here that we can find that sheds light on our current and particular situation of need? This question implies that we are in a living, life giving and ongoing relationship with God that is part of this relationship. It allows our scriptures to form some of that dialogue. In other words, we read and ponder our scriptures regularly and our imagination has a role to play too.
- ▶ I have already touched on the **Tradition** with our reference to Ignatius of Loyola. However, we ask ourselves, is there anything else? Numbers of the saints have reflected on discernment that might assist us.
- ▶ The third external element in discernment is to **seek counsel** from a wise Christian friend at the local Church – perhaps more than one. Talk to your priest. It is important that they understand the process and what you are trying to do is to seek God's will. They should have no agenda of their own, only to help to seek God's will for you.
- ▶ We recognise in all this that we are part of the Body of Christ. Jesus is the true vine (John 15.1-8), We are one of the branches and in relation with every other branch on the vine. Further, the vine grower is the Father and in discernment we are being pruned, a necessary task.
- ▶ Finally, we always need to remember Jesus' last words to His disciples at the Ascension: 'Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (Matthew 28.20) We are never alone. AtG/B20/MBH

Attending to God

'Listening to God ... Discernment' Part Two



When visiting the optician to have our eyes tested we soon learn that it takes time and patience. As the settings are refined, the machine placed in front of our eyes is continually being adjusted, until a moment is reached when there is complete clarity.

Much the same can happen with discernment. It will take time and patience on our part as we seek to understand what God is saying concerning a particular situation. Of course, sometimes it may happen very quickly and there is that 'aha' moment, but very often we find it a struggle and emotionally painful.

It is in that struggle that we draw near to God and at the same time grow in spiritual depth. As we know, we usually appreciate that for which we have had to struggle as opposed to that which comes too easily. I think God is more interested in the relationship than in the solution to an immediate problem. But, because the issue is important to us and our well-being, it is also important to Him.

Discernment is not like mentoring, which in this case, would be like God trying to teach us to stand on our own two feet. Some of this may be involved, but discernment is more about wisdom than gaining skills. It is as the psalmist says in relation to God, 'You that desire truth in the inward parts: O teach me wisdom in the secret places of the heart' (51.6) It is lifelong learning. It is not a 'quick fix', or teaching 'self-help'.

It is more like Jacob wrestling with God or the angel of God (Genesis 32.29) as he seeks an answer to the problems he has created for and by himself. He is left with a limp for the rest of his life through this encounter. As we come face-to-face with our limitations and recognise our frailty, we too can emerge from our encounter with God with a deepened humility. In fact, humility in this is essential.

Nor is discernment common sense. Common sense should have told Jesus after his transfiguration experience not to go to Jerusalem, for death would await Him. Yet the discernment that

came from this experience told Him that this was exactly what He should do. This was the Father's will; a bigger story than simply Jesus saving His life was being played out on the world stage. Common sense should have told Peter to stick with fishing than to leave all behind and tramp the hills of Galilee. Yet the wisdom that came from discernment said otherwise. We need to discern to see whether this comes from God (1 John 4.1) or from some other source.

The wisdom resulting from discernment can at times leave us vulnerable, as it did both Jesus, Peter and all the others. Not always, but sometimes. God also has that same vulnerability for He created this world, this universe, and invites our cooperation as we shape its future. In the light of that, discerning the will of God is critically important both for the big and small picture (Romans 12.2). We need that spirit of wisdom that comes from God (Ephesians 1.17) and then we will find ourselves drawn to being vulnerable beside God.

Discernment is more than having a set of skills in decision-making, for there is no set formula that will unfailingly reveal the will of God. That power to discern wisely comes from the Holy Spirit who gives the gift of Himself, revealed in us as a yearning, or longing, to do the will of God in a particular concrete situation. The purpose and goal of spiritual discernment, is to know and do God's will.

No matter how hard we try, there will be times when we get it wrong. God knows this. What is of critical importance is having that deep desire to do God's will. Because of this, we will find that God works to make our wrong choices right. The path that we should have chosen, but did not, even though we tried hard, will somehow become possible and God will work to make things right. Nevertheless, we had to make a decision in order to learn what the right course would be. It is only ever in hindsight that we can recognise this for we can ever only see God's traces in the mirror. Our new glasses enable us now to see this issue clearly.