

Homily: 23rd Sunday: Cycle C: 2016: Wis 9: 13-18; Ps. 90; Phlm 9-10, 12-17; Lk 14: 25-33

“Holy Discernment”

To discern means to deliberate, to perceive the distinctions of something. In the spiritual life it means to figure out God’s will in concrete situations and circumstances. This is what I want to look at today in this homily, inspired by the first reading from the book of Wisdom.

1. **Only in the Holy Spirit can we know God’s will**, for we are so frail, weak, and wavering in our convictions on our own, as human beings, as the first reading from the book of Wisdom points out today, “*who ever knew the Lord’s counsel, except to whom He has given wisdom and sent your Holy Spirit to from on high?*” Only if we invite the Holy Spirit to get involved in our life *are our paths made straight and the fickleness of our human heart is overcome*. **What does God want of us? To be holy as He is holy!** And to be holy, we must freely embrace **His will** for our life, in love and docility, in big and small ways. **How do we do this?**

2. **When you or I are trying to figure if something is in accord with God’s will or not- what are we to do?** Well there are some **clear rules for discernment** handed down to us by the spiritual masters of the Catholic Faith, namely the saints. There are **five** main ones (see Fr. Scanlan’s book: *What Does God Want?*). **For everyday decisions the first two rules apply; for big life changing decisions all five rules apply.** What are they?
 - **Does it conform to God’s objective will?** – This is made known to us through the 10 Commandments and the clear teachings of the Catholic Church on faith and morals (see *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*). In addition we need to factor in our established daily duties and commitments in our vocation that are not objectively sinful: *family, work, school*. **Note:** we may need to do some study and searching into the teaching of the Church on a particular area which we are discerning and trying to make a decision in - if we don’t know the teaching on that topic. Having a spiritual director helps in this regard as well.

- **Does it encourage conversion?** – This means to become more Christ-like, to draw closer to God. That is what Jesus is getting at in the Gospel today. Devotion to God must be the number one priority in our lives. Family, job, possessions, status, social activities, human friendships, etc., all must conform to our love and obedience to God and His will. Otherwise they are false idols! Jesus is radical, but what He says is true!
 - **Is it consistent?** – How has God worked with us in the past? There is usually a pattern to how God deals with different souls and personalities. But you can only get in tune with this reality, if you are a person of prayer and reflection, and ponder God’s working in your life over time.
 - **What or who confirms it?** – **Is there a holy sign:** a novena answered, something happening on a certain date, e.g., the feast of one of our favorite saints, just things falling into place: doors of opportunity being open or shut. Also God could work to manifest His will for us through a devout person who knows us well and can give godly direction to us. This could be a spiritual director, a confessor, a spiritual friend who is a person of real integrity, maybe our spouse or even a relative, sometimes even an enemy.
 - **Finally does our heart say yes?** – In the core of our being do we have an ongoing sense of joy and peace about the decision? Or is our heart full of fear, unease, and discontent? Some fear of the unknown is natural when we are making a big decision, but overriding that should be a sense of joy and peace, especially when we pray and reflect about it. Some examples: *Should I marry this person? Should I change careers or jobs? Is God calling me to give my life to Him as a priest or a sister? Should I switch spiritual directors, or pick a spiritual director to help me on the path to holiness for the first time in my life? Should I take on this new family commitment?* In BIG DECISIONS the heart must say yes! God will NEVER force us to do anything! He wants our decision, especially on BIG matters, to be acts of love not of coercion!
3. To be able to put these rules of discernment into practice we need **the virtue of courage** as well as the other gifts of the Holy Spirit, **to overcome the fickleness**

of our fallen human nature which settles for the easy path, the lowest common denominator, the thing that will give us the most immediate gratification - while often not thinking of the long term consequences for our lives. To tap into the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to us in Baptism and renewed and deepened in the Sacrament of Confirmation we must become more and more men and women of prayer. We do need to **set aside time each day** (an hour?), in our busy schedules to **encounter the Lord**. There are many ways to do this: *by pondering His holy Word in the Sacred Scriptures, praying the Rosary and chaplet of Divine Mercy, coming to daily Mass, Eucharistic Holy Hours (see our new Friday 3 p.m. holy hour), times of adoration and visits to the Blessed Sacrament.* Also it helps to study our Catholic faith more deeply through good books, CD's, shows on EWTN, Catholic radio, and adult ed classes. Monthly Confession is also a huge help in sensitizing us to God. As well as dying to ourselves (fasting) through an active life of mortification and self-denial and accepting the trials God sends us on a daily basis for our ongoing spiritual purification. Finally embarking on a life of charity (almsgiving) through *the Spiritual and Corporeal works of Mercy* of the Church, depending on our health, circumstances, and vocation. If we do all these things more and more, in love, then the Holy Spirit will give us the grace of holy wisdom on a daily basis, and we will be able to better see God's will in big and small moments, and then with His grace be able, in love, to put His holy will into practice, *so we can become more and more holy as He is holy, to the glory of the Blessed Trinity - which is the spiritual goal of the whole Christian life* (see *A Still Small Voice* by Fr. Benedict Groeschel, pp 116-117). God bless you.

Recommended Reading:

Catechism of the Catholic Church. 1994.

A Still Small Voice: A Practical Guide on Reported Revelations by Fr. Benedict Groeschel. Ignatius Press. 1993.

Seeking Spiritual Direction: How to Grow the Divine Life Within by Fr. Thomas Dubay. Servant Books. 1993.

What Does God Want? A Practical Guide to Making Decisions by Fr. Michael Scanlan. Our Sunday Visitor Books. 1996.