



DISCERNMENT

BENEFITS

Discernment of Spirits

- Various known or described as:
 - + Discovering God's action in our lives.
 - + Learning to read the signals of the times.
 - + The place where prayer and action meet.
 - + A way of sifting through our desires and passions.
 - + Testing inner movements to see;
 - Which are from God or another source.
 - Which led to God or elsewhere.
 - + Listening to the movements of the Spirit.



St Ignatius Loyola 1491-1556

“One time his eyes were opened a little, and he began to marvel at the difference and to reflect upon it, realizing from experience that some thoughts left him sad and others happy. Little by little he came to recognize the difference between the spirits that agitated him, one from the demon, the other from God”.

[Autobiography 8]

- Discernment is a precious gift from God, it is integral to our personal and corporate apostolic life.
- It begins in contemplating God at work in our world and allows us to draw more fruit in joining our efforts to God's desire for us.
- Discernment is what grounds us in the Church in which the Spirit works and distributes various gifts for the common good.
- Discernment serves as the foundation for decision making.

What is Discernment?

- + Gift from God.**
- + Holy Spirit at Work.**
- + In the Church.**
- + Foundation for decisions.**
- + For the common good.**

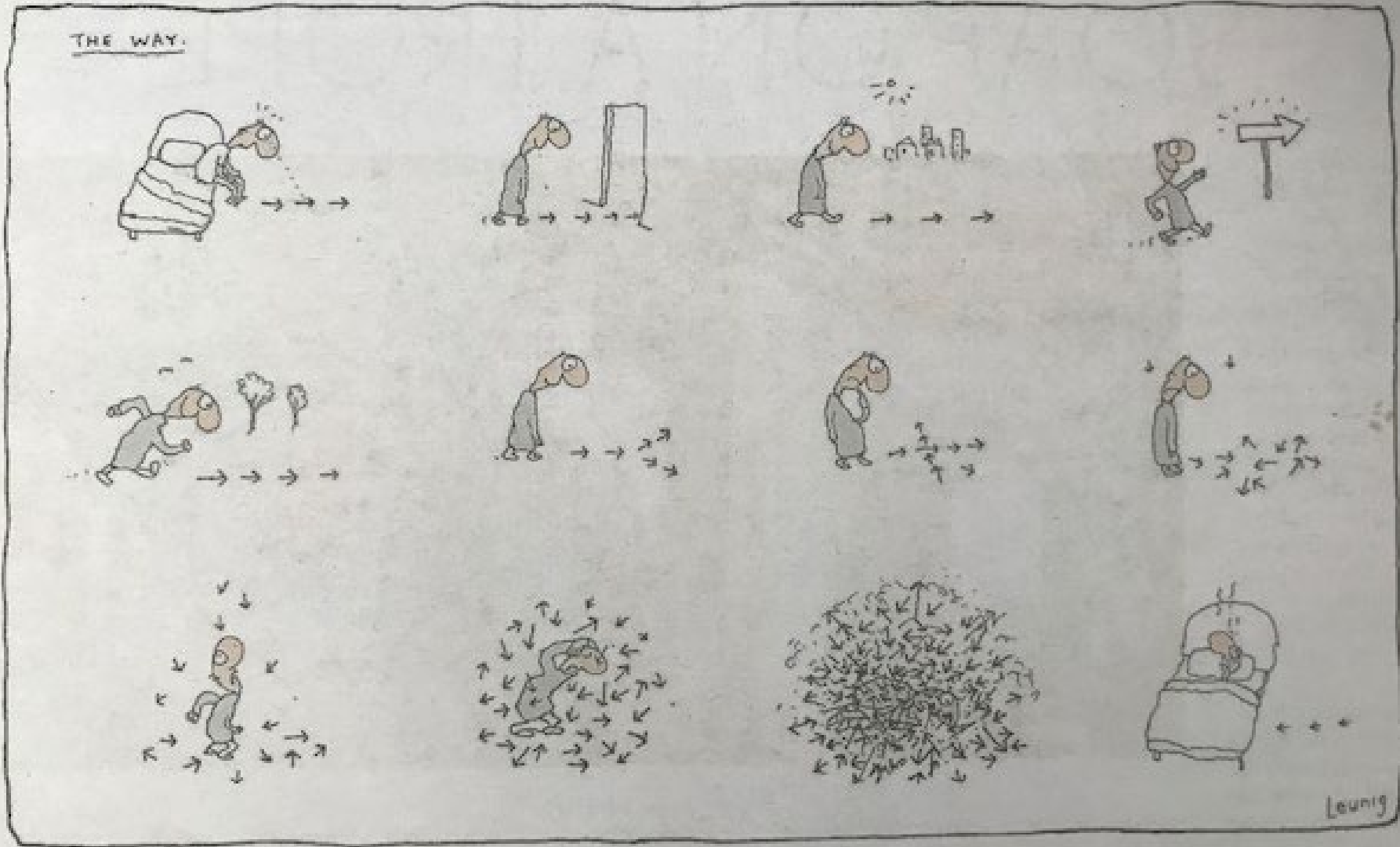
DISCERNMENT IS

Discernment is ...

An understanding of the movement of the Spirit within myself [and others] so that I [we] may better strive for interior freedom and the service of God.

Vintage Leunig

THE WAY.



Pope Francis on Discernment

- “Every Christian ought to grow in the ability to ‘read within’ his or her life, and to understand where and to what he or she is being called by the Lord, in order to carry on God’s mission.”
- For Pope Francis discernment is reflection and prayer that leads to decisions in keeping with God’s plan for us.

Pope Francis on Discernment

- Francis also reminds us that discernment requires obedience to the gospel and to the church teaching, but, “it is not a matter of applying rules or repeating what was done in the past,” he advises, “since the same solutions are not valid in all circumstances and what was useful in one context may not prove so in another.” In fact, “the discernment of spirits liberates us from rigidity, which has no place before the perennial ‘today’ of the risen Lord.”

DISCERNMENT

PERSONAL
or
COMMUNAL

- The constant sifting through inner feeling and thoughts for a deeper hearing of God's call.
- Looking for the lead of the Holy Spirit.
- Asking ourselves where does this joy, sadness, love or compassion come from.
- Asking what is God's invitation in his situation.
- Looking for the deceptions of the false spirit ["the enemy"]
- Sometimes leads to a decision.
- Is accompanied by prayer.
- AWARENESS EXAMEN or CONSCIOUSNESS EXAMEN

DISCERNMENT

PERSONAL

- Communal or apostolic discernment is when we come together as a group to discern where and how the Lord is leading us in our work, parish or diocese.
- Our mission is deepened and ministry is extended when we collaborate with those we work with, those we share a common mission and community.
- Communal discernment is always proceeded and accompanied by prayer.
- It is not just arguing a position, however it can lead to the winning or losing of a position.
- A richer hearing of God's call: seeing, listening and considering in the imagination how to follow Jesus.
- Commitment to the decision made by the group.

DISCERNMENT

COMMUNAL [APOSTOLIC]

- + **Group**
- + **For Ministry**
- + **Prayerful**
- + **Listening**
- + **Deciding**
- + **Commitment**

- Active listening can transform both the listener and the speaker. When we really listen we feel different.
- Noticing what get in the way; our own priorities, needs, anxieties and prejudices.
- Be open minded.
- Be honest with self and others
- Ready to let go on my ideas.
- Take people seriously, affirm their values and dignity. Value who they are.
- Be prepared to rejoice in the other, having a sense of the others gifts and talents.
- Develop a sense of solidarity even when you may disagree.
- Be grateful for everything – gratitude leads to joy – the joy of the gospel.

DISCERNMENT

**Qualities necessary
for**

**Communal
Discernment**

Solidarity

Admiration

Gratitude

Humility

HOW TO GET THERE

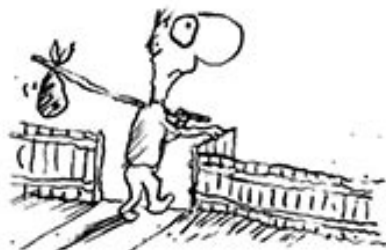
Go to the end of the path until you get to the gate.



Sit down and have a rest every now and again.



Go through the gate and head straight out towards the horizon.



But keep on going.
Just keep on with it.



Keep going towards the horizon.



Keep on going as far as you can.
That's how you get there.



Leunig

We do not come to
communal discernment
with our minds already
made up.

Communal Discernment

**Remain open to the
movements of the
Spirit within the
group**

1. **When there is no doubt.** Sometimes the right decision is unmistakably clear. The knowledge is a gift from God. All we need to do is act.
2. **When feelings are unsettled.** Decision-making in these circumstances means observing and interpreting these feelings. We discern their spiritual meaning and discover how they point to the right choice
3. **When emotions are calm.** We approach the decision in a tranquil and settled frame of mind. Here St Ignatius has us prayerfully weighing the pros and cons of each alternative and conduct some exercises that help us clarify the options.

Discernment

Three Circumstances
for making a
Decision.

St Ignatius Loyola



Luke 1:26-38

Annunciation

Dispositions for Discernment

1. Prayer
2. To listen
3. To notice feelings
4. Seek clarification.
5. Peace – yes
6. Clarification

Obstacles to good Discernment

1. Fear of making the wrong decision.
2. Failure to act.
3. Wanting to be in control.
4. Lack of prayer.

Why is Discernment essential to the Plenary Council?

- We belong to a universal Church. We also act locally. We want to listen to the Spirit. We want to know what God is asking of us here and now.
- All are invited to participate in discovering what God wants of us at this time.
- Discernment is the way we discover God's mission for ourselves and the Church.
- We looking for a more synodal church. Looking at the signs of the times. Involving as many as possible
- It is the way we make decisions in the church. More than one discerning group
- It calls all to a deeper listening. To discover the voice of the Spirit.
- It calls us to a greater freedom – to let go – to act.
- It is our way of being faithful to the Gospel and the Church.

- Gospel call of Jesus :
- “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.’ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed”. Mark 5:19-20.

Why is
Discernment
important?

**Jesus call us to
share what is
happening in our
hearts.**

- Romans 8.5: For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit* set their minds on the things of the Spirit.*
- Romans 8.14: For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.
- Romans 8.26: Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes* with sighs too deep for words.
- 1 Corinthians 2.10: these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.
- 1 Corinthians 2.12: Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

Hearing the Spirit.

In the early Christian Church nothing was done without reference to the Spirit.

Consolation

-

Desolation

An increase in
faith, hope and
love.

A diminishment
of faith, hope
and love.

Good Spirit

—

Evil Spirit

- **The Good Spirit.**

- + Comes from – leads to God.
- + The good Spirit leads a person in a good direction towards a good, to a good goal.
 - + The good spirit , strengthens and encourages, consoles and inspires, establishes a peace, gives delight and joy and sometimes moves to a firm resolve.

- **The Evil/Bad/False Spirit or Voice.**

- + Not from God; leads away from God.
- + Evil spirits make use of evil directions, and even sometimes of what are at first good directions, to accomplish an evil end.
- + Evil spirit tries discouragement and deception to deter us from growing in the life of Christ.
- + Evil Spirit, attempts to rouse a false sadness, brings anxiety , suggests roadblocks and false lies.

Signs of the Good and the Bad

Signs of the Good Spirit

- There is a real sense of our own worth, a renewed confidence.
- Hope comes alive; we believe Jesus is with us, no matter what.
- There is a genuine feeling of movement: 'it hasn't got to be like this. I want to do something about it, and I can do something about it'.
- Something lifts from us; we feel lighter, liberated.
- We grow in compassion, and sensitivity to the needs of others.

Signs of the Bad Spirit

- Loss of the sense of our own worth.
- We are down on ourselves and think and even speak of ourselves in ways we would never dream of speaking about anyone else.
- Hope is blighted and fades away; the light goes out.
- There is a feeling of being stuck or trapped of having nowhere to go or going round in circles, of being down in a big black hole.
- There is a pervasive sense of heaviness; we feel burdened.
- We degenerate into cynicism (can't see any good in anyone), or self-pity

Signs of the Good and the Bad

Signs of the Good Spirit

- A questioning that is accompanied by clarity and conviction.
- We are led to bring our concerns into our relationship with Jesus, and focus on the relationship rather than on issue. We tell Him (even repeatedly!) how the issue affects us.
- “It is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another’s statement than to condemn it as false”. (None of us has a monopoly on the truth).
- We are led to let go of our hurts, and are able to pray— ‘Jesus, give me the attitude to this person you want me to have’.
- Awareness of sin always tinged with hope and leads us back into the relationship with Jesus, and others.

Signs of the Bad Spirit

- A questioning that creates anxiety and ends in confusion.
- We find ourselves mulling constantly over incidents, or giving all our attention to resolving some issue and end up more fragmented and de-energized than when we started.
- We are easily led into negative interactions with others that degenerate into mutual recriminations, and ‘I’m right, your wrong’ attitude”.
- “Some people carry in their hearts the corpses of past relationships, addicted to hurt as a confirmation of identity.”
- When we think of our sins and failings, we feel bad about ourselves and stay there.

What do we pay attention to?

Two remarks:

1. The way of the Bad Spirit is to lead us away from relationships; the way of the Good Spirit is to lead us more deeply into relationships.
2. What we give our attention to, colours all the other areas of our life. If we focus on negativity, the negativity will spread; if we focus on 'grace' (which is life giving), the grace will spread.

Effects

- **The Good Spirit leads to:**

- + Integration of our feelings
- + Increase of faith, hope and love.
- + Deepening sense of presence to God, ourselves and others.
- + Greater peace.
- + Consolation.

- **The Evil Spirit/False Voice leads to:**

- + Anxiety.
- + A divided heart
- + Divided attention
- + Lack of presence
- + turmoil, disintegration
- + desolation

- Prayerful
- Growing in self knowledge.
- Reverence for self-others-life.
- A sense of relatedness.
- Generosity of Heart.
- Ability to listen to self and others.

Signs of a
Discerning
person

Prayerful

Self-Knowledge

Reverence

Related

Generous

Listens

- A prayerful disposition.
- Honesty
- A true image of God.
- Motivational awareness.
- Decision is between good things.
- Deep listening, openness to new possibilities.

Presumes

Prayerful

Honest

Positive image of God

Good Motivation

Between goods

Listen

DISCERNMENT

St Ignatius Loyola reminds us that circumstances of our lives and world are constantly changing. Therefore discernment is a constant dynamic activity demanding an active relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Discernment is always done in relation to the purpose
for which we were created
to

Praise, Reverence and Serve God

Principle and Foundation- Spiritual Exercises [23]