

## THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS

### **I. Prayer**

- Seek the presence of God. Strive for a quiet and listening stance.
- Grace to ask for: a pure heart, inner peace, spiritual freedom (indifference), clarity, guidance from the Holy Spirit
- Use relevant scripture passages to provide the context and direction for prayer.
- Notice any initial fear, agitation, discouragement, aversion, etc. that reveal unfreedom. Any serious attachments and disordered affections will prevent proper discernment.
- Serious and prolonged prayer is necessary for a fruitful discernment. Prayer sustains the entire discernment process where different info, choices, insights, feelings, spiritual movements are sifted and tested for authenticity.

### **II. Adequate Knowledge**

- Gather sufficient information and relevant data.
- What are choices and options that present themselves as possible paths? (Narrow them to two or three serious ones to be discerned.)
- Notice the positive and negative aspects of each option (advantages/disadvantages). At this stage, be careful not to lean one way or another to ensure all choices are given adequate consideration.
- Take them to prayer, be attentive to any emerging insights or new choices.

### **III. Reflection on Affective Responses**

- Notice what stirs within your heart as you pray, especially the *spontaneous* affective experiences that emerge prayer (feelings, desires, impulses, fear, agitation, etc.).
- Be attentive to the feelings in prayer. They will serve as markers that reveal the course of direction. If some feelings are particularly strong or move deeply, sit with them and see where they lead you.
- Notice any thought process or affective experience that reveals the deeper spiritual movements of consolation and desolation (*movements or counter-movements*). Remember true consolation leads to a deeper, freer and more genuine relationship with God.
- Be aware of false consolation or rushing ahead of the process and grace.

### **IV. Judgment – Weighing the Reasons**

- Examine the reasons for and against each option, noting that some are more important than others so give more weight to them (prioritizing the reasons).
- Notice the attractions and aversions to the different choices (both intellectually and affectively).

- Based on the affective movements and consolation experienced in prayer, come to a tentative (unconfirmed) decision.

## **V. Confirmation**

- If one course appears to be the right one, choose it and act on it.
- The experiences of consolation or desolation will reveal whether a decision is attuned with the Spirit. Be aware of deceptions (false consolation) and avoid being misled by the evil spirit.
- After a decision has been reached, some form of confirmation of the decision or its opposite will be experienced in the subsequent living out of the decision. Continue to be attentive and bring the consequences of the decision to prayer for further deepening of the grace received.
- If the results from the decision show that something is not quite right, such experiences of affective and spiritual desolation, or some other compelling evidences against the original discernment, go back to the phase II of the process.

## **Additional Comments:**

1. Spiritual discernment is a fluid process that cannot be divided into distinct stages as above, but it should include all of these essential elements.
2. Once a tentative decision is made, the discernment is not done because one must continue to discern whether that unconfirmed decision is in fact authentic and does indeed represent God's will based on the immediate consequences.
3. Desolation is not necessarily bad in discernment because it can help clarify and reveal another course of direction. When dealing with desolation, knowing its root cause can often help lead to greater spiritual freedom.
4. God works with us even in our imperfection and brokenness. If one makes a mistake or an error in judgment in good faith, God will work with it.