

Foundation and Concepts of Discernment, Attachments (Session 3)

I. Spiritual Movements

- In discernment we are primarily dealing with **spiritual movements** that take place within our consciousness and experience, especially our prayer experience. In the process, we *sift through our interior movements* to recognize what are God's grace and wisdom that must guide our journey and what are the stumbling blocks and obstacles that get in the way of us responding to God's life-giving invitation.
- **Image:** Moses assembled the people of Israel and addressed them in Deuteronomy, "Today I set before you life and prosperity, death and adversity... If you love Yahweh and follow his ways... you will live and increase... But if your heart turns away and are led astray... you will perish... I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live" (*Dt 30: 15-19*)
- The overall context of discernment is God's covenantal relationship with us. A relationship that is rooted in God's unconditional love for us and a desire for us to live in freedom and mutual faithfulness to God. Discernment is to come to know the mind of God (from a subjective experience) in listening intensely to how the Spirit is beckoning us.
- **Discernment becomes then our capacity to enter into that sacred relationship in the changing unique circumstances of our lives, to distinguish between two paths: life or death.**
- In discernment, we are primarily interested in interpreting the basic spiritual movements as we experience them. One toward God and one basically away from God. These two movements constitute the process of how we come to know God's desires and yearnings for us.
- **A word here about God's will!** Though tradition has a long association with the terminology of God's will, however, in thinking of the will of God sometimes offers a picture that is rather restrictive and less helpful. Often, associated with an understanding of the will of God, people often imagine God as a director who has written the script of our lives beforehand (predestined) or a puppet master. The concern here is the issue of **human freedom**, arguably the most precious gift and characteristic of human consciousness. To say that somehow we are called to follow God's way but at the same time, have the freedom to choose to enter into relationship with God, we must recognize the respect that God allows us. Therefore, it is probably more helpful to think of God's will for us as God's desire and yearning for us. There, the profound gift of **human freedom is preserved** as we become co-partners with God in the process (though qualitatively, we play a much lesser role in the covenantal relationship)

II. Attachments and Spiritual Freedom

- **Disordered attachments** are dynamics within ourselves that keeps us from being able to freely respond to God.

- Sinful tendencies or patterns of behaviors that are unhealthy or destructive to our relationship with God. Focus not so much on the actual sinning (acts) but patterns of behaviors, tendencies, habits, unfreedoms within us.
- **Attachments** focus on the **self** rather on God and others. It is a rupturing of our relationship with God and others. A self-centered orientation that put us first before God (focus on the gifts rather the Giver). And Jesus reminds us of the greatest commandment: restore the relationship with God and others through love.
- Attachments become the stumbling blocks that keep tripping us in our journey with the Lord.
- The key to finding God's will (desire/yearnings) reflects in our gift of **spiritual freedom**. In the context of discernment, we need to recall that God never imposes, rather graciously invites us to collaborate with God and with one another to bring about the reign of God.
- Our true freedom, that is, **spiritual freedom lies in our capacity to respond freely and wholeheartedly to this invitation** (*freedom from* disordered attachments that leads to *freedom for* God's love and grace). Conversion (metanoia – turning away) or transformation of hearts (hardened, dead to a new heart in Christ)
- The whole story of the Israelites in Exodus is to be freed from the disordered attachments that enslaved them in Egypt to a freedom in grace.
- Discernment, therefore, is more than just a pragmatic method or steps to making choices in our lives. Rather, it must be **contextualized within a framework of this right-ordered relationship with God**.

III. Consolation and Desolation: The Basis of Discernment

- Within these thematic spiritual movements of *toward God* and *away from* God are two particular terms that hold great significance to the discernment process: the experience of **consolation and desolation**.
- Simply put it, the experience of **consolation is any spiritual movement in our experience that draw us toward God** and **desolation is any spiritual movement that move us away from God or is in opposition to God**. The key point to note here is that consolation and desolation primarily describe our state of being (freedom) and the direction where we are moving, rather than a passing feeling or sensation. Even though, it is through the affective experience that we come to know the spiritual movements of spirit.
- **The experience of consolation and desolation is the foundation of discernment**. Without consolation and desolation there are no inner movements to sift through. Therefore, the basis for discernment does not exist since discernment means to sift through, distinguish, understand, and separate the interior movements that result from God's involvement.

- Another way to understand consolation and desolation is through “**inordinate attachments**” or **disordered affections**. Consolation and desolation are experienced when an “inordinate attachment” is being touched by God’s grace. God moves in one’s heart and mind to bring clarity and light to areas of darkness and unfreedoms—what Ignatius calls disordered affections. In discernment, the experience of consolation and desolation reveals what affections and areas of our experience are in congruence with God’s way (consolation) and what affections are “inordinately attached” to something other than God’s ways (desolation).
- In order to understand how these two basic spiritual movements perceived in our experience, we must look at the role of affectivity and reason within this continual dialogue with God.
- Some representative affects/feelings that normally accompany the experience of consolation and desolation: **Caution that these feelings can be misleading, or deceptive.**
 - **Consolation:** peace of mind, joy, lightness of heart, increase of faith, hope and love, quiet inner rest, deep conviction, harmony, patience, self-acceptance, etc.
 - **Desolation:** troubled mind, confusion, darkness, agitation, dryness, dejection, convoluted reasoning, boredom, restlessness, apathy, fear, rage, sinful thoughts and impulses, despair, etc.
- **Example:** a racist person who goes out and hurt someone. Experience deep conviction and peace. Yet, it is obvious that this person is not living in the grace of God.

IV. Balance & Equilibrium

- The whole process in the Sp. Ex. (1st Principle & Foundation) is to be freed enough in order that we may respond to God’s calling.