

Discernment With Mary and Ignatius

By: Dawn Hausmann

“And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.’...And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’” (Lk 1:30-31,38)

If there is one person who we should imitate who knows how to truly discern a vocation, it is Mary. If we have hearts as open to the life of God as Mary does, we will find it very easy to discern God’s will for us. Mary reveals to us a whole of life lived according to God’s will. She has no clue what her ‘yes’ to God will entail. What will happen to her life, her reputation, her situation with Joseph, the details of bearing God in her womb if she says ‘yes’ to the angel? Only God knows all the details. The great beauty of Mary is that she doesn’t fret over all the details of following a call of the Lord; the one thing she cares about is that her soul magnifies the Lord and that her spirit rejoices in God her Savior! If we only knew the beauty and joy of life lived fully in accord with God’s plan, we would never desire to step one inch outside of it.

The great ingredients of discernment are found in Mary’s disposition before the Lord:

- 1) Total Trust. Come to pray and believe that God’s Will for each of us is where we will find the greatest joy and happiness of our life. Have faith in His great Plan!
- 2) Total Abandonment. Have a disposition of hands open and laid upon our knees before the Lord, handing Him all the desires of our hearts, trusting that whatever He does with those desires will be much better than any plan we could try creating.
- 3) Readiness. Be alert, awake, aware, and ready to respond promptly to the calling of the Lord.
- 4) Faith. Believe that God will give you the grace to do anything that He asks of you. He has made you with a purpose; therefore He will give you the tools to live it out.
- 5) Love. We can do nothing without love. Love God and your neighbor. Pray always.

These are a few discernment tips by way of Mary’s life. Now here’s a few according to the way of St. Ignatius.

St. Ignatius is known to be gifted by God according to the understanding and discerning of spirits, providing us with tools for discernment. Without claiming to be a great interpreter of Ignatius’ work of his *Spiritual Exercises*, I will share just a few of his basic concepts and suggest you read his work.

The main idea of discernment for Ignatius is focused around learning the language of how and by what one’s soul is moved, by good or evil spirits, and how to respond properly. This requires becoming aware of the movements, understanding them, and taking action either by rejecting the evil

spirits or accepting and growing according to the good spirits. To do this, Ignatius has a whole set of rules. These rules are focused on two realities: spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation.

The times of spiritual consolation usually come from the good spirits. Some of the traits that help us discern good spirits are the joy and peace that come with some pattern of consistency around an idea. There usually is a great experience of love and praise for the Creator that follows. Consolation encourages one to be filled with an increase in the virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

The times of spiritual desolation usually come from the evil spirits. This 'desert time' is centered on despair, sadness, anxiety, depression, lack of confidence or hope, and a decrease in virtues. This is usually the opposite to the time of consolation.

One huge piece of advice is that good discernment cannot happen in times of desolation because that is most commonly when the evil spirits are influencing one's soul. Therefore, whatever idea in prayer or decision that may come in moments of consolation, with consistency, should never be changed in times of desolation. Don't make any major life changes in times of desolation. Always wait till you are in times of consistent consolation to make any major life decisions because that is when the good spirits are most commonly leading us.

To recognize these movements is the first step to understanding them and knowing how to respond properly. This description of consolation and desolation is only a glimpse of Ignatius' wisdom. There is much more to understand according to these ideas, however I highly advise a reading of Ignatius' work to come to a fuller understanding of discerning the movement of the soul.

I want to leave you with a great prayer from Ignatius that is helpful to pray daily:

"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To you, O Lord, I return it. All is Yours, dispose of it wholly according to Your will. Give me Your love and Your grace, for this is sufficient for me."

I pray that God may bless you in your time of prayer and discernment regarding all of life's decisions.