

DECISIONS, DECISIONS!!

We all have lots of decisions to take every day of our lives. Some are more important than others. Discernment is more to do with actually seeking what God wants you to do in a particular situation. True discernment takes place within the context of prayer and is for a particular concrete situation. Discernment does not take place in a hypothetical situation. Discernment is for a particular individual with their particular gifts and graces in a particular situation. Group discernment can also take place but that is a slightly different process and certainly takes longer.

It is a fundamental conviction of Ignatian spirituality that God communicates himself to us through ideas and feelings, but especially through feelings. Therefore, when a course of action has been decided upon a good test is, 'how does it feel?' If the feelings are of turbulence, disturbance, restlessness, inner darkness and the like, then the choice is almost certainly not of God. On the other hand if the feelings are of peace, tranquility and a sense of fittingness then it is more likely to have come from God. The process of discernment is a matter of sifting through the various feelings and discovering those that bring 'desolation' and those that bring 'consolation'. Sometimes this is best done with a little help from another, for example, a really good soul friend, or a spiritual director.

It is precisely because feelings are so important that it is not a good idea to make a decision when we are in a state of unrest and our feelings are all over the place, for example, during a time of loss.

A word of caution. In spite of what one often hears in church conversation, I don't believe that 'oughts' and 'shoulds' are part of the Christian vocabulary!! Those two words are very punishing words and God does not punish. Jesus invites people to follow him. Slaves are driven and God wants friends not slaves. If you are feeling driven, check out where that is coming from.

There will be further thoughts on discernment next week.

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