

Ignatian Wisdom for Discernment

There are Three Conditions Conducive for Discernment

1 – when there is no doubt “... when God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that, without doubting or being able to doubt, the devout soul follows what is shown to it...”; there is deep peace, joy, confidence, secure sense of being loved by God and this is in harmony with God.

2 – when there is sufficient clarity “...when enough light and knowledge is received by experience of consolations and desolations and by the experience of the discernment of various spirits...”; alternating certainties and doubts, attractions to one choice then another, experiencing consolations (moved – to love for God, self, others; to tears at the amazing grace of mercy and at Jesus’ passion for us; to increase in hope, faith, love, compassion, joy, the intent to praise and serve God; an abiding sense of peace) and desolations (the opposite; moved to – darkness of soul, disturbance, things low and earthly; to disquiet, agitations, temptation; lack of hope, love, compassion, joy; to selfishness, despair, rebelliousness; a kind of relentless agitation and misery); as I alternate between these, I notice clarity emerging.

3 – a time of serenity...I am not tossed back and forth between consolations and desolations; I am able to think clearly and have the free use of my reasoning abilities to choose what will allow me best to praise, reverence, and serve God; when I am in a condition of serenity like this, I can follow the advice of four suggestions:

- A. Grounded in God’s love, I imagine a person I’ve never met before coming to me for help in his/her desire to make a Godly choice about exactly the matter I am considering; wanting the best for this person, I observe the advice I would give.
- B. I imagine I am at the point of death with both the clarity and freedom of that moment...from that vantage point, what is the decision I would want to have made?

C. I imagine life has now ended and I am with Christ talking about the decision which I have made. I choose the course of action which I sense will give me happiness and joy in talking about this with him then.

D. I follow the practice below carefully and prayerfully

1. I collect all the information needed to make an informed choice. I then compose myself in God's presence, intent on making the choice which will best support my priority concern which is to praise, reverence, and serve God.
2. I ask for the grace of discernment about the matter at hand. I proceed only if I feel myself at 'poised freedom,' that is, at a point of willingness to cooperate with whatever the discernment turns out to be. If I find myself not at such a point, I postpone the discernment process and pray for that freedom and for the patience to wait for it before moving ahead.
3. I formulate a statement in the positive about my issue which can be answered 'yes' or 'no.' For example, I will take the position at X Company; not, I will not take the position at X Company; and also not, What job should I take? I only seek discernment about one matter at a time.
4. I write the statement at the top of a page and then list all the reasons **against** it first without editing or judging or attempting to rank the reasons in any way. When finished, I take a short break.
5. I return and now list all the reasons **for** it, again without editing, judging, etc. I take another short break.
6. I return to the lists and begin sifting and sorting through the reasons, noting in particular my **feelings**. What gives me peace, joy, a sense of rightness, serenity, the experience of love of God, of myself, of others? Where do I feel turmoil, anxiety, heaviness, resistance, distance from God, myself, and others?
7. I weigh my responses. It is not how many reasons I have in one list or the other, but the significance of them. Which feels more substantive?
8. As clarity emerges, I imagine living out of that choice. I ask for a confirming sign and then am on the lookout for it. It may come anyway...a chance phone call, a song, something I hear or read.
9. When I sense the discernment given, I offer it to God and ask for God's blessing. Remembering that discernment is more about trust than it is about certainty, I choose to trust. I give thanks.