

## Discernment

by Muriel Hanman, Oblate team member

The first thing that came to my mind when I thought of discernment was that to be truly discerning we need to have in place an alive and healthy prayer life! We need to have a regular time of silence in order for us to listen and to hear the voice of the Lord speaking in our hearts.

In the Benedictine tradition there are four elements which nourish and support personal discernment and lead to wisdom of heart: silence, solitude, lectio and prayer.

We **MUST** be committed to the silence.

Ray and I have a little quote above our bookcases in our home that says “Let us be silent that we may hear the whisper of God”, a reminder that even books need to be put aside to hear God’s voice.

We need to take time for reflection on the Word so that the Spirit can speak with us. She will speak to us through everything, everyone, in every situation and at all times of our lives. What WE need to do is to take the time to listen which will enable us to become more and more aware of that still small voice, whisper, or the “gut feelings” of intuition.

And we need to have the courage to trust all these senses. To believe it is truly the Lord speaking to each one of us in the depth of our beings.

In The Rule of Benedict (Prologue 1) “LISTEN” is the very first word! And in Prologue 9 he says “We open our eyes to see the light of God and our ears that we may hear the voice of God”. We learn to trust the leading of the Lord for ourselves. We enter the invisible church of the heart to be in touch with the source of Truth.

A quote from Swami Abhishiktananda (who incidentally, was a Benedictine monk before, like Bede Griffiths, becoming a Swami) “We live at the very Source. Our duty therefore is not with canals and waterworks downstream... but to make sure that the water flows plentifully and unceasingly from the Source itself”.

The teaching of Jesus is that the purity to which each one of us is called is an interior purity. It is an interior clarity. That is where we have to start, that is where – as it were – we sharpen our vision. And the extraordinary thing about the Christian revelation is that the interior clarity to which each of us is summoned is nothing less than His own presence, His own being, His own love.

Ray and I just yesterday were reading a quote from Rumi “Each of us sees the Unseen in proportion to the clarity of our heart, and that depends upon how much we have polished it. Whoever has polished more sees more – more Unseen forms become manifest.”

Letter to Czeslaw Milosz from Thomas Merton, Feb. 1959

...life is on our side. The silence and the Cross... we know are forces that cannot be defeated. In silence and suffering, in the heartbreaking effort to be honest in the midst of dishonesty (most of all our own dishonesty), in all these is victory. It is Christ in us who drives us through darkness to a light of which we have no conception and which can only be found by passing through apparent despair. Everything has to be tested. All relationships must be tried. All loyalties have to pass through fire. Much has to be lost. Much in us has to die, even much that is best in us. But Victory is certain.

Discernment is about listening to the calls in our life. I can't talk about discernment without touching on the process for decision making suggested by Ignatius.

I have made a hand out for you to consider if you would like to take one with you. It illustrates the way in which we can consider decisions. Jotting down the pros and cons both for and against each situation we might find ourselves in.

I found this to be very helpful in my process of deciding to leave my previous marriage. On the face of it, it seemed to me to be a very "wrong" thing to do, certainly from my own perspective of being a loyal, Catholic, committed wife. Many of my well meaning friends prayed for our marriage and it never occurred to them, or to me, that it may not be God's will for me to stay in this "marriage". Eventually, however, after many years of spiritual direction and guidance and as my own relationship with God matured, I came to understand that this was not a life giving situation for me. I listened prayerfully to that wee small voice of God. Usually I would consult and confide in a spiritual advisor, friend or counselor. But, because I know that I can be very easily swayed and influenced by other people's thoughts or opinions I knew, that at this point for me, it was wiser that I process this particular decision on my own.

– AND so – I got out my four columns!!

I listened carefully to everyone, to everything, in every situation. I took time to listen and became more and more aware of that still small voice in my heart, in my mind, and in my soul and spirit.

I chose to trust all my senses and my intuition.

Things became much clearer and I was able to face the consequences of my decision with peace and confidence. Then I felt able to discern and confident in my decision, based on that discernment.

I will end with this short prayer...

Most gentle God, you have fed us this day with your holy Word. May we continue to discern your calls in life, family, community and in the movements of our hearts. May

we always be among those who worship you in spirit and in truth. “Everyone who belongs to the Truth listens to my voice”. We ask this through the intercession of all those who give their lives in your service. Amen.\*

\*Prayer adapted from: Carmelite Monastery. *Companion to the Breviary : A Four-Week Psalter with Intercessions*. Indianapolis, IN: Psalter, 1999. Print.