

Vocation Reflections

July 2023



School Sisters of Notre Dame

Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, SSND Foundress, reminds us:

If we would always recognize the guidance and formative hand of God in the various events of life, we would see some things in a different light and know how to use all for the good of our souls.

(Letter #5235: March 21, 1877)

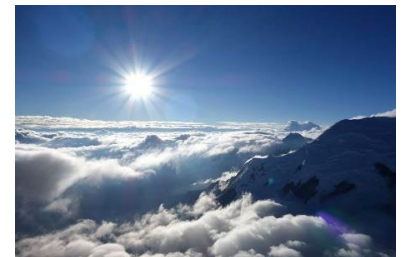
The Journey of Discernment

For centuries and millennia, seekers have thirsted to know God's path in very discerning ways. They have searched to hear God's call to them. God has always responded, for God is always near, is always present, dwells in us, is God-with-us.

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)

The prophet Isaiah wrote:

"In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream towards it; many peoples shall come and say: 'Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths...'"



And this passage concludes:

"O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!" (Is. 2:2-5)

These words give clues to the meaning and journey of "discernment". We look for light, for God's instruction so that we may walk in God's paths. Discernment is a journey of life where we long to see with God's light, where we take time to wait for that light to grow brighter, where God's "instruction" comes to us through preparing a heart-space to listen and to gather understanding. Sincere discernment is an opportunity to let the light shatter the darkness of our questions, doubts, wonderings.

Spiritual discernment, then, is about discovering God's path through the very concrete reality of our daily lives. Reflecting on the ordinary events in our lives, we come to know ourselves and our deepest desires, and then be open to know God's direction. No two people ever walk the discernment path in the same way, for God's active presence within each person is unique and shapes one's journey. We only must be faithful to listen deeply to that God-presence in all of life, in the context of our own daily lived experiences. And what follows is the call to be courageous enough to trust, to discern, and then to act on God's revelations which come in those experiences. For the fruit of discernment is a unity of desires, God's and ours:

"The habit of discernment is about coming to live in the oneness of God's desire and ours...it is about an unrestricted love in all of life." (Rose Mary Dougherty, SSND, Discernment, p. 28).

Though this journey of discernment may at times appear challenging, assistance and comfort can be found in these words from the book of Deuteronomy 3:11-14:

"For this charge which I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, 'Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' No, it is something VERY NEAR to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out."

Vocation Reflections is a monthly newsletter for those interested in learning more about discernment, prayer, and other topics related to the consecrated/vowed life. For questions, comments and subscription information, please contact sisters@ssnd.org.

King Solomon, great seeker of wisdom, prayed for a discerning heart and heard God's response:

"Solomon said, 'Give your servant a heart to understand your people and to discern right from wrong. For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?' ... And God said to him: 'Because you have asked for this ... I do as you requested. I give you a heart so wise and understanding that there has never been anyone like you up to now' ..." (1Kings 3:9-12)

Again Solomon's prayer and praise in the book of Wisdom 7:7 confirms this gift:

"Therefore, I prayed, and understanding was given me; I pleaded and the Spirit of Wisdom came to me."

From the Gospel of John we hear yet again another search, that of the Samaritan woman who finds Jesus patiently journeying with her in discerning ways:

"The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water. ... I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Anointed; when he comes, he will tell us everything.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking with you.'" (John 4:15-26)

So, time and again, the light in discernment surprisingly comes in the midst of the very life-moment I am presently living. Yes, the voice of God is responding to my request to see and know what I am looking for in that very moment of encounter: *"I am the one who is speaking with you now!"*

The freedom needed to enter into discernment, to seek the light and bear its fruits presupposes:

- a ready and open heart, that is uncluttered and willing to let go of whatever holds one back from walking the new path;
- a listening heart, to truly be attentive to new movements in the heart, sensitive to the Spirit's voice, listening as Solomon did for understanding;
- a humble heart and a flexible mind, ready to let go of personal preferences in order to enter into something new, to walk with the light.

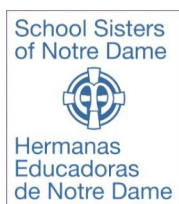
Finally, with this freedom, truly the journey of **call – discernment – response** will bear fruit as St. Paul affirms: *"For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Christ."* (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Reflection Questions ~

1. Reflect with the Scripture passages. Which passage most nourishes or brings light to your present life journey? Why?
2. Come in touch with a darkness you still experience. Choose a word or phrase of these Scripture passages to accompany your journey as you seek that light which will shatter the darkness.

DID YOU KNOW?

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God's cause
is the *only* concern of
our hearts

