

Vocation Reflections

May 2024



School Sisters of Notre Dame

“When the bell calls to prayer, recognize it as the invitation of the divine bridegroom to rest in his heart ..., there to gather new strength, new comfort, and new courage.”

*Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, Foundress, School Sisters of Notre Dame
(Letter #5327, October 30, 1878)*

Prayer for Discernment¹

Steer the ship of my life, good Lord, to your quiet harbor,
where I can be safe from the storms of sin and conflict.
Show me the course I should take.
Renew in me the gift of discernment,
so that I can always see the right direction in which I should go.
And give me the strength and the courage to choose the right course,
even when the sea is rough and the waves are high,
knowing that through enduring hardship and danger,
we shall find comfort and peace.



~ attributed to St. Basil of Caesarea (ca. 329-379)

Discernment might seem like an exercise only for the most spiritually fit. But simply put, discernment is decision-making in which God is part of the conversation.

Too easily, as we work through a decision, we end up acting as if we are on our own. Weighing pros and cons, attending to our emotional responses, consulting others, and relying on the wisdom of our religious tradition are all good practices when making a decision. However, we can sometimes forget a most important step: asking the Holy Spirit to guide us, as St. Basil's prayer shows us.

Why is asking for God's help in decision-making so important? It is *not* that God won't help us unless we ask for help. Our God is much more generous and faithful than that. Our helping God gave us free will and respects that freedom, which means God will not impose God's will on us. Instead, God invites us to cooperate in realizing God's desire for us and our world. Basil's prayer for discernment is a way of deepening the conversation that God has already begun in us through the desire to ask for help in the first place. In discernment, desire meets desire. God's freedom meets our own.



In freedom, God labors through our natural abilities and dispositions, even our limitations. When we pray Basil's prayer, we are liberated to consider paths we might otherwise miss. Asking God to "show me the course I should take" and "see the right direction in which I should go," we escape our myopia and enjoy a new perspective. When we ask for God's help, we also acknowledge our blind spots and unruly passions. Attending to these limitations, we are less likely to shipwreck.

So when you pray, "Steer the ship of my life, good Lord," imagine your hands on the rudder of your ship, not clutching it in desperation as the boat is rocked back and forth, but holding it lightly because God's hands are over your own. Together, you feel the currents of the sea and tack this way or that. You look ahead confidently because God is helping you through the gifts of mind, body, and spirit that God gave you. In rough seas, you do not fear crashing into the shore because you know and feel that God is with you, gently guiding you to your quiet harbor.

~ Fr. Kevin O'Brien

Kevin O'Brien, a Jesuit priest and educator, is author of [Seeing with the Heart: A Guide to Navigating Life's Adventures](#). As vice-provost at Fairfield University, he directs a new Jesuit community college program in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

¹Fr. Kevin O'Brien, "Prayer for Discernment," from the January 2024 issue of *Give Us This Day* giveusthisday.org (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2024). Used with permission.

Reflection:

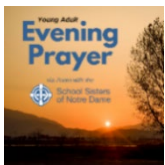
1. Where do you find yourself on the course or path of discernment now? In what way are you finding God present on that course, steering the ship of your life?
2. Find a quiet space, perhaps in nature or in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament or in a treasured quiet corner of your surroundings. Feel God's hands over yours on the rudder of your ship of life. In that stillness and silence, with strength and courage, feel God quieting the storms and leading you forward on the next waves of your discernment, of your path.

This month's vocation resource

How can I avoid distractions when I pray?

<https://anunslife.org/blogs/discovering-god-s-calling/avoiding-distractions-in-prayer>

Looking ahead *(Click the event title to learn more.)*



Online Evening Prayer

For young adults ages 18+
May 28 and June 25
8 p.m. ET / 7 p.m. CT



Summer Service Week 2024

For any women ages 18-45
July 14-20, 2024
Whole Kids Outreach in Ellington, MO
Please register by May 31. Space is limited.


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



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