

**DISCERNMENT**  
**(12/13/05 TOPIC OF DISCUSSION)**  
**PRESENTED BY MICHAEL FETSKO**

**Discernment** – definition from the Latin “discernere”: to separate, sever, distinguish. In this context it means openness to the voice of God. Discernment calls us to reform and convert. It remains a daily task for the Catholic Christian who is called to listen to God; to quiet oneself through the frantic activity of this Christmas season and to focus on what is important.

Discernment is a task for all seasons and is repeated throughout the Old Testament when people are “Called,” like Abraham, Moses, the prophets, etc. For the Christian the call is more subtle and must be listened for through the din and chaos of life. This takes discipline; extraneous sounds must be consciously filtered out. It means being still, being quiet, being open. We are called through Baptism to be followers of Jesus Christ, to turn away and be dead to sin and alive in Him, to imitate Him. What helps us in this process is being actively involved in the Sacramental life of the Church and meditating on the Sacred Scriptures.

Our Blessed Mother is a supreme example of discernment as she listens and obeys the call of God through the message of an angel. She is invited to participate in the Salvation plan for the human race. Being a creature of free will she no doubt had the option of saying “No” but because of her formation in the Holy Scriptures and her predisposition to grace (“Hail Full of Grace” was the salutation from the Angel) her response was a resounding “Yes” as she offered herself as the “Handmaid of the Lord” and said “Be it done unto me according to Your Word.” Mary’s response was also based on her Trust in God which is a task of discernment as well. She knew that the One who was making the request was completely trustworthy and would do what He promised. Refer to the prayer of the Blessed Virgin in the gospel of St. Luke, Chap 2 (The Magnificat – My Soul Magnifies the Lord). Because of Mary’s “Yes” to God she received a place of High Honor (Hyperdulia) which ranks second only to God himself. Saints are honored (Dulia) and of course God receives highest praise and honor (Latria). Lack of trust or discernment may not be sin in itself but can lead to sin. One must grow in discernment as one matures in the faith. This also implies growing in our relationship to God.

One can use the example of a father reprimanding his child. His expectations of the child are based on how aware the child is of right and wrong and this in turn is based upon how well the child is formed, through instruction, in that understanding. God holds us responsible in the degree that we know the truth but built into every human is a fundamental awareness of right and wrong and a desire to know God. There are those who have a greater responsibility because of their level of knowledge. Jesus, in the Gospel accounts was compelled to challenge the religious leaders of the time not because they were sinners, like we all are, but because of their arrogance, pride and self-righteousness; they should

have known better. Jesus was tender and responsive to sinners. He was often seen in their company and He invited them to grow.

St. Peter's response to Jesus' question "Who do you say that I Am?" was based on discernment aided by the Holy Spirit "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus acknowledges St. Peter's openness to the Holy Spirit and makes him the foundation of the Church "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." The role of discernment regarding doctrine and teachings of the Catholic Church was established at this time and has been passed on through the centuries via the Magisterium or teaching authority of the church down to the present day. This is in fulfillment of Jesus' promise that he would not leave us orphans. Therefore Peter was commissioned along with the 12 apostles to go out and convert, through Baptism, the whole world. The hierarchy of the Church was established – the Apostles were the first Bishops (Episcopal Authority). Through various councils through the centuries the particular books of the bible were decided upon and canonized, again through discernment aided directly by the Holy Spirit. The teaching authority of the Catholic Church can be traced back in unbroken sequence all the way to St. Peter. St. Peter was the first Pope. Some terms to be familiar with.. Episcopacy – Bishops; Presbyters – Priests; and Diaconate – Deacons. It was about 100 years after the 12 apostles that the Church was first referred to as Catholic which means universal.

The first split between the Eastern Church in Constantinople and the Western Church in Rome occurred about 1000AD. In the 1500's Martin Luther who was an Augustinian priest broke with the Catholic Church and started the Lutheran denomination. He had differences of opinion and revolted against the authority of the Church. He developed his own doctrine based on his personal understanding of the scriptures and held that scripture alone was the authority (sola scriptura). Thus began a cascade of fractures in Christianity which has resulted in what is believed to be approx 30,000 separate denominations of Christianity.

The texts of the bible are various in their styles. There is poetry, allegory, history, prophecy, narratives and figurative language. Individual Catholics are encouraged to read the Holy Scriptures for inspiration, encouragement and comfort, always deferring matters of doctrine to the discernment of The Teaching Body (Magisterium) of the church who safeguards the faithful from doctrinal error by careful discernment through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In a spirit of humility, therefore, are we as Catholics called to submit our wills in obedience to the teaching authority of the Church even if we lack understanding; "I believe so I may understand" should be our stance instead of "I will only believe if I can understand." Humility and obedience are prerequisites to true discernment, and this also implies Trust in God. There are many terms by which we understand our faith, and these are not necessarily mentioned by name in the Bible; i.e. "The Trinity" is a developed doctrine that does not contradict scripture. We must trust the church – Our Mother – to guide us into truth because she is the gatekeeper and trustee of the full deposit of truth handed down by Jesus Christ Himself to be

**disseminated to her children. Trust, Faith and Obedience are tasks that sometimes take a lifetime to develop. Grace makes that possible through the discernment and guidance of the Holy Spirit – that interior Voice of God.**

**A prayer for today and for Advent: God you made us and called us to be your people. Help us to keep our eyes focused on you during this busy season. Attract our hearts to you when we get sidetracked by what is not important. Help us know that we belong to you alone. Teach our hearts through our sharing this day. Amen.**

**Submitted by,**

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