

DISCERNEMENT OF THE SPIRIT

IHS

God is here.

That is the preaching of John the Baptist: "The Kingdom of God IS at hand."

God is here.

That is the preaching of Jesus Christ: "The Kingdom of God IS at hand."

God is here.

That is the preaching of the Apostles: "Christ IS risen from the dead. The Kingdom of God is at hand."

We don't just remember what God used to do.

We don't just wait for what God will eventually do.

God's Kingdom is at hand.

According to Jesus, Behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.

Or also according to Jesus, BEHOLD, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

But after Jesus ascends into heaven, how is God's word audible?

After Jesus ascends into heaven, how is God's work visible?

Who makes God's word audible?

Is it not those who receive the Holy Spirit and speak up using our own voices?

Who makes God's work visible?

Is it not those who receive the Holy Spirit and work using our own hands?

Are you baptized in the Holy Spirit?

Are you sealed in the Holy Spirit?

Then how are YOU going to speak God's word?

How are YOU going to accomplish the works of God?

Good evening.

I am brother John Ignatius, and I have been asked to help you learn a little more about Discernment of Spirits, which is basically how to test something and discover whether something that occurs to you, something that arises within you, something that you're thinking or feeling is possibly from God, or possibly from yourself, or possibly from the enemy.

How do you tell?

How do you sift your thoughts, feelings and inspirations?

How do you discover and discern what is holy, what is good, and what is not?

In a world full of deceptive advertising, manipulative marketing, and sinful human beings, how do you discern what is helpful and what is harmful?

Like Eve in the garden, we can be taken in by the cunning of the serpent.
Like Eve in the garden, we can see with our eyes that the fruit is attractive.
Like Eve in the garden, we observe that the fruit is suitable for gaining wisdom.
Like Eve in the garden, we can be deceived.
Like Eve in the garden, we can trust the serpent, rather than God.
Like Eve in the garden, we can trust our own senses rather than God.

Or worse, like Judas, we can reach for material profit and 30 pieces of silver, all the while disobeying and betraying the very Lord who saves us and offers us eternal life.

God is here.
How do we tell what's from God?

We exercise what is known as the gift of Discernment of Spirits.

It is a gift that St Paul describes in Corinthians.
It is also a gift the St John presumes Christians have and always exercise when he says,
Beloved, DO NOT TRUST EVERY SPIRIT, BUT TEST THE SPIRITS TO SEE WHETHER THEY ARE OF GOD.

Are you skeptical? That can be useful.
Are you cautious? That can be helpful.

According to St John, you are not to be gullible.
And St Paul warns Timothy against deceivers of every kind.

So how do you avoid being deceived by others?
And how do you avoid being deceived interiorly by yourself?

The first thing I would say is check yourself.
If you are going to participate in a prayer meeting, or you are going to pray over someone, or you are considering leading a prayer group or speaking publicly, are you in a state of grace? Are you free from mortal sin? Are you in sacramental communion with the Church?

Your vision is better, and your discernment is sharper if you have no obstacles in your relationship with God and with the Body of Christ which is the Church. Someone who is serious sin or someone who is in broken communion with the Church CAN be used by God, but the person is less free and more susceptible to distortion and deception in WHAT they say and HOW they say it if there is unconfessed brokenness in their lives.

Secondly, when you check yourself, are you living faithfully your regular vocation and responsibilities? Whether that vocation is husband or wife, mother or father, provider or homemaker, student or employee – how are you doing with your regular responsibilities? I do not propose that only those perfectly fulfilling their vocations

should be confident to speak – because then none of us would qualify. But disturbances and disruptions in primary relationships and responsibilities can lead to distortions in the representation of spiritual gifts due to excessive needs for affirmation, over-compensation for other failures, rationalizations and self-justifications. Again, we don't have to be perfect to express our gifts, but the more faithful and fruitful our regular lives are, the more secure and sure we can be that our gifts are being expressed from authenticity and integrity, rather than from over-compensation, or unmet needs, or religious escapism.

If we've made some interior checks of our own state of life, then how do we examine and discern what occurs to us interiorly, or what we hear from others exteriorly?

Here are a few excellent and praiseworthy criteria...

WORD OF GOD

1. How does it correspond with the Word of God? What is its relationship with the Word of God? Has God ever communicated anything like it before? Does this fit with the way God has spoken in the past?

The Word of God is living and effective. The Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.

If Eve had been faithful to the Word of God, she would not have eaten the fruit. If Judas had been faithful to the Word of God, he would not have fallen into greed and betrayal.

The Word of God is a strong shield. And if you are a Christian of any kind, you should be feeding yourself daily with the Word of God.

Jesus said, *Not by Bread alone does man live, but by every WORD that proceeds from the mouth of God.*

That means, just as you feed yourself physically every day, you need to feed yourself spiritually every day. If you are provided your daily PHYSICAL bread, you need to be consuming also some daily SPIRITUAL bread – that is, the Word of God.

In Ephesians we are COMMANDED to take up the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

And Psalm #1 declares that the man who is blessed DELIGHTS in the law of God, and meditates on his WORD day and night.

So I believe, any and every Christian needs to be reading and chewing and reflecting and applying the Word of God every single day....and how much more if you are an active Christian in prayer meetings or bible studies, or ministry of any kind. This Word of God tells us who God is, and it is trustworthy. And when you hear a human word (yours or somebody else's), you can begin measuring

that word against God's word, and see if there is some overlap, some correspondence, some similarity. Your first source of discernment of a word is the WORD OF GOD HIMSELF.

JESUS

2. SECOND, the Word of God became flesh in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the 2nd person of the Trinity and the King of heaven and earth. Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

So you might ask, how does this inspiration or image or word of knowledge or interpretation appear when I SAY the Name of Jesus? How does this inspiration or image or word or interpretation appear when I PRAISE Jesus aloud? If there is an image of Jesus, or better yet, if there is the real presence of Jesus available, how does this image or interpretation appear when I look at Jesus, or if I offer it to Jesus as a gift?

Does the image or word or feeling increase or decrease? Does it get stronger or weaker? Does it grow or diminish? Is it confirmed or contradicted? Am I more confident or more questioning? Do I become more hopeful or more hesitant? The disciples in Luke 10 proclaim, LORD, *Even the demons are subject to us in your name.*

ST JOHN writes "*Every spirit which confesses that JESUS CHRIST has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God*".

So if the first criterion is how this does correspond to the Word of God? The second criterion is how does this correspond to the Name and the Person of Jesus?

FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

3. THIRD: In the present moment, how does it relate to the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The fruits of the spirit are described in Galatians 5, and also in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. ST PAUL says in Galatians 5: The works of the flesh are immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Therefore, when I experience an image or interpretation internally, does it come with anger or with patience?

Does it come with strife or with peace?

Does it come with jealousy or with kindness?

Does it come with selfishness or with self-control?

How does it feel? What are your perceptions?

Notice, this is not the primary criteria for evaluation.

The primary criteria are the Word of God, and relationship to Jesus.

But these criteria involve the heart of the one perceiving, either perceiving inside, or perceiving outside. It requires some sensitivity to intuition, and it is not full-proof. But these criteria described by St Paul and by the Church, and we need to be free to apply the criteria of the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit while we are exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

UNITY OF THE CHURCH

4. If the FIRST criteria is correspondence to a historical word, and the SECOND criteria is correspondence to the NAME & PERSON of JESUS, and the THIRD criteria is a correspondence to the fruits of the Holy Spirit, then the FOURTH criteria is relation to the Unity of the Church.

The Holy Catholic Church has been founded by Jesus Christ, and is established in worship, doctrine and governance as a hierarchy with a magisterium.

How is this word or image or interpretation related to the worship, doctrine or governance of the Church? Is there any relation? If the word or interpretation or image is for an individual or a prayer meeting, does it tend toward more faithfulness and unity with what the Church teaches and celebrates? Does it in any way introduce strain or tension with Church sacraments or Church teaching or Church Authority? Very frequently, images and words are of a more personal or immediate concern rather than a public or universal concern, and so this criteria may not be relevant. But when the word or image tends to influence someone's relation to Truth or Sacramental Grace or Ecclesial Authority, what is its influence, and does it foster unity in the Body of Christ?

1 Corinthians 14:12 *So with yourselves; since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the Church*

DISCERNMENT of OTHERS/Take Counsel

5. FIFTH, While not universally or absolutely necessary, how does this Word or Image or Interpretation bear up under the scrutiny and discernment of someone else? Is the Word or Image or Interpretation humbly submissive to the counsel of another Christian or a prayer partner? How does a Christian spouse or Christian friend respond when they hear the word? Would you be willing to submit this Word to someone else for discernment? Is there a discernment leader, or a prayer team leader who could examine the word with you?

Proverbs 11:14 says *"Where there is no guidance, a people falls; but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."*

Proverbs 15:22 says *"Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed."*

Does the Word or Image or Interpretation have sufficient humility to be submitted? Does the Word or Image or Interpretation have a willingness to be corrected or revised?

Is the Word or Image or Interpretation willing to be offered and examined by others for confirmation or deliberation or delay or deferral?

It is a sign of maturity when a wise person is willing to be sincere with others in expressing his conviction, and let others receive the expression or not in complete freedom.

Where does it lead? Long-term fruits?

6. One criteria that can only be determined after-the-fact is what are the LONG TERM fruits of this revelation or this inspiration? How does it affect the person who gave it? How does it affect the ones who have received it?

Does it lead them to greater repentance from sin, and greater faith, hope and love in the Lord?

Does it lead them to stronger or weaker commitment to prayer and works of mercy?

Does it lead them to greater praise and worship of God, or not?

The question then becomes, not *where does this come from?* but *WHERE DOES it LEAD?*

Matthew 7:20 Thus you will know them by their fruits

And Catholics, while we don't always get certainty, we are certainly permitted to learn by experience.

We learn how to drive by experience.

We learn how to read by experience.

We learn how to work by experience.

And we learn how to exercise gifts by experience.

If you are humble and loving, you should be willing to make mistakes and to learn from them.

If your community is humble and loving, you should be willing to let others make mistakes and to learn from them.

You don't raise healthy children by paranoia and micro-management.

You will not raise a healthy prayer group by paranoia and micro-management.

Just as children learn to spell and learn their math by practicing, making mistakes, and getting better – so Christians learn to praise aloud and pray aloud and prophesy aloud and share images aloud by practicing, by making mistakes, and by getting better.

Be not afraid.

Be not afraid to share your gifts.

Be not afraid to ask for counsel.

Be not afraid to grow in your gifts.

Be not afraid to risk uncertainty.

Be not afraid to speak up – for who will speak God's word, if not you?

Be not afraid to be corrected.

Be not afraid to help others to grow by correction and by encouragement.

Be not afraid to praise and serve God, however new and immature, or however old and experienced you are.

God is here.

He has given you His Word to help you discern.

He has given you His Son to help you discern.

He has revealed the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit to help you discern.

He has given you His Holy Church to help you discern.

He has given you the counsel and discernment of others to help you grow in discernment.

He has given you perception of the long—term effects and fruits of your words and prophecies and inspirations, so that you can keep growing and discerning God's way that leads to life.

So briefly, when I am praying over someone, or I am attending a prayer meeting, how do I discern?

1. Am I in a state of grace, and therefore a state of readiness, to be used by God to my best potential
2. Am I already fulfilling my state of life as a consecrated and am I attending to my regular responsibilities and duties at home and in ministry?
3. Does what I am receiving or thinking of saying in accord with God's Word?
4. Are my thoughts and words submitted to Jesus, both in WHAT I say and HOW I say it?
5. Are what I am receiving or considering from the fruits of the spirit or from the works of the flesh?
6. Is what I am about to offer in accord with the Doctrine, Sacraments and Teaching Authority of the Church?
7. Am I willing to have my words examined by others, and am I open to growth through counsel and correction?
8. Finally, to the best of my knowledge, are these words and inspirations aiming toward good, healthy long-term fruits in my life and in the lives of others? Whether I am planting, or cultivating, or irrigating, or harvesting – is there fruitfulness FOR OTHERS that I hope for in what I am discerning and communicating?

Be not afraid.

If you pray in the name of Jesus,

if you praise in the name of the Trinity,

if you remain under the sign of the Cross,

and if you speak from faithful and sincere hearts for the upbuilding of the Church,

even if you are wrong, God will make use of your mistakes in helping you grow and in helping others to grow.

You need to be humble, and you need to be honest, and God can magnify himself and console and confirm your brothers and sisters, through the words that you speak forth in the power of the spirit, and the works that you accomplish for the greater glory of God.

Thank you for your invitation to speak with you tonight.

May God bless you abundantly during this Holy Week and Easter Season!

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