

Reminders and Resources for Part 1 of the Homily Series:
Discernment — Noticing God’s Guidance in Our Lives

Discernment is “the process of intentionally becoming aware of how God is present, active, and calling us... so that we can respond with increasingly greater faithfulness.”

— Sr. Elizabeth Liebert

WEEK 1: Prepare the Heart

Discernment begins by creating space to listen.

“The human heart plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps.” — Proverbs 16:9

Spiritually

- Seek an openness to God’s will.
- Pray to desire what God desires.

Practically

- Clarify the question you are discerning.
- Identify the real options before you.

Matthew 13:1–23 — The Parable of the Sower

Jesus names four kinds of ground: compact, rocky, thorny, and good. The seed (word of God) is the same in all four contexts, but its growth depends upon the soil. We are to till the soil of our interior life so that God’s voice can be received and take root.

Throughout Scripture, we often see Jesus withdrawing to quiet places to pray before making significant decisions (e.g., beginning public ministry, choosing apostles, etc.). He demonstrates that discernment begins with solitude, silence, and attentiveness.

Practice preparing the heart

- Slow down and spend time alone with God. Be humble, honest, and open about your fears, desires, attachments, and limitations. Surrender them to God’s care.
- Clarify the question you are discerning. Sometimes a complex issue needs to be broken down into smaller pieces so we can focus on one part at a time.

Discernment sometimes involves a genuine dilemma, choosing between undesirable options. (e.g., Which course of treatment do I choose — aggressive chemotherapy with pain and uncertain results, or palliative care for comfort not cure?). Discernment is not necessarily about happiness or certainty, but about moving toward a deeper peace.

WEEK 2: Gather Wisdom

After preparing the heart, we widen our lens to gain greater insight.

Interior Wisdom

- Pray with the question.
- Notice desires, fears, and values.
- Pay attention to what brings peace, energy, and life.

External Wisdom

- Gather practical information and facts.
- Seek counsel from trusted mentors.
- Consult Scripture, Church teaching, and the realities of your circumstances.

Discernment is not rushed. It takes time to notice patterns. Wisdom emerges gradually.

Matthew 13:24–43 – The Wheat and the Weeds

The farmer faces a challenge: the wheat is entangled with weeds. Rather than act prematurely, he waits in order to distinguish what is life-giving from what is not. So it is with discernment. Patience is required for the harvest of clarity, to reveal the next step.

Throughout his life, Jesus modeled what gathering wisdom looks like. He prayed, immersed himself in Scripture, listened to others deeply, retreated into solitude to attune to God without distraction, exercised great patience, and trusted God's timing.

Practice gathering wisdom

- Pay attention to the interior movements while also looking at external information. Pray, gather data, and talk to trusted mentors.
- Patiently sort through the wheat and weeds: What is life-giving? What is not? Sometimes these look very similar at first, so resist rushing the process.

"...knowledge, experience, emotion, will. These are some of the indispensable elements of discernment; Discernment... involves hard work... We do not find set before us, pre-packaged, the life we are to live. No! We have to decide it all the time, according to the reality that comes. God invites us to evaluate and choose: He created us free and wants us to exercise our freedom. Therefore, discerning is demanding."

— Pope Francis

Online Resources:

- "Deciding Like a Jesuit" by Fr. Michael Rossmann, SJ — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGQSa5zYzro&list=PLCdChYtOSWBiTpodtEhGGIWDpZxr7-foZ&index=1>
- The Ignatian Examen — <https://www.jesuits.org/spirituality/the-ignatian-examen/>
- Suscipe, the Radical Prayer — <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/prayers-by-st-ignatius-and-others/suscipe-the-radical-prayer/>
- Discernment Prayers — <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/discernment>

Books:

- *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making* — Elizabeth Liebert, SNJM
- *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living* — Timothy Gallagher, OMV
- *Saying Yes: Discovering and Responding to God's Will in Your Life* — Albert Haase, OFM
- *Inner Compass* — Margaret Silf
- *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* — Henri J. M. Nouwen
- *When the Heart Waits* — Sue Monk Kidd
- *Discern: Listening for God's Whispers* — Mark E. Thibodeaux, SJ

Mark your calendars for Part 2 of this series:

Nov 7-8 • Prayerfully Decide | Nov 14-15 • Review and Refine