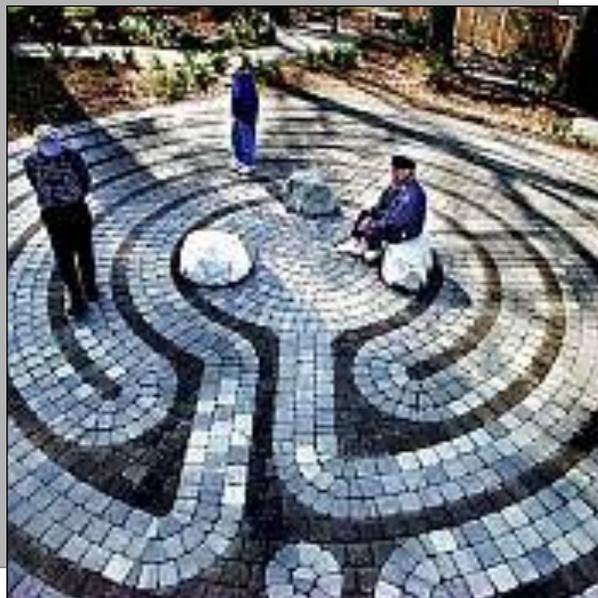


# *The Sacred Art of Prayer*



A spiritual journey of the heart

DAY THREE

On Obedience & Discernment:  
Listening with the Ears of the Heart



**DAY THREE: OBEDIENCE**  
**“LISTENING WITH THE EARS OF THE HEART”**

**OBJECTIVE:**

- To develop a deeper understanding of the “Christians decisions-making process” - Discernment
- To illustrate this process by using the Ignatian discernment approach
- Discernment –as the act of seeing the work of god in the world- is the first step in the direction to “Conversion of life” through the exercise of “Obedience”

**SESSION DEVELOPMENT:**

1. Prayers & Bible Reading
2. Brief summary of past sessions
  - How was walking/using the labyrinth? Personal discoveries, stories, difficulties
  - The rhythm of the heart and Stability - Any further thoughts?
3. Introduction to discernment: connecting the “Opus Dei” and the “Ora et Labora”
4. Biblical discernment
5. Ignatian discernment
6. Walking the neighborhood
7. Next steps

**OPENING PRAYERS:**

**PRAYERS**

*Brief moment of silence*

**Psalm 139**

***Domine, probasti***

1 Lord, you have searched me out and known me; \*  
you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

2 You trace my journeys and my resting-places \*  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, \*  
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

4 You press upon me behind and before \*  
and lay your hand upon me.

5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; \*  
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.

6 Where can I go then from your Spirit? \*  
where can I flee from your presence?

7 If I climb up to heaven, you are there; \*  
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

8 If I take the wings of the morning \*  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

9 Even there your hand will lead me \*  
and your right hand hold me fast.

10 If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, \*  
and the light around me turn to night,"

11 Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; \*  
darkness and light to you are both alike.

12 For you yourself created my inmost parts; \*  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

13 I will thank you because I am marvelously made; \*  
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.

14 My body was not hidden from you, \*  
while I was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.

15 Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb; all of them were written in your book; \*  
they were fashioned day by day, when as yet there was none of them.

16 How deep I find your thoughts, O God! \*  
how great is the sum of them!

17 If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand; \*  
to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.

18 Oh, that you would slay the wicked, O God! \*  
You that thirst for blood, depart from me.

19 They speak spitefully against you; \*  
your enemies take your Name in vain.

20 Do I not hate those, O Lord, who hate you? \*  
and do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

21 I hate them with a perfect hatred; \*  
they have become my own enemies.

22 Search me out, O God, and know my heart; \*  
try me and know my restless thoughts.

23 Look well whether there be any wickedness in me \*  
and lead me in the way that is everlasting.

### **A Reading from Ephesians 5, 11-17**

<sup>11-16</sup> Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork, the barren pursuits of darkness. Expose these things for the sham they are. It's a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see. Rip the cover off those frauds and see how attractive they look in the light of Christ.

Wake up from your sleep,  
Climb out of your coffins;

Christ will show you the light!

So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!

<sup>17</sup> Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants.

### ***Short Lectio Divina***

#### **DISCERNMENT**

***Holy God, be in my mind***

***that I might let go of all that diminishes the  
movement of Your Spirit within me.***

***Discerning God, be in my eyes,***

***that I might see You in the midst of all the  
business that fills my life.***

***Loving God, be in my heart, to those I love,***

***to those with whom I share ministry  
and to the whole human family.***

***Gracious God, be in that grace-filled silence that lies***

***deep within me, that I might live in Christ as  
Christ lives in me.***

***Amen***

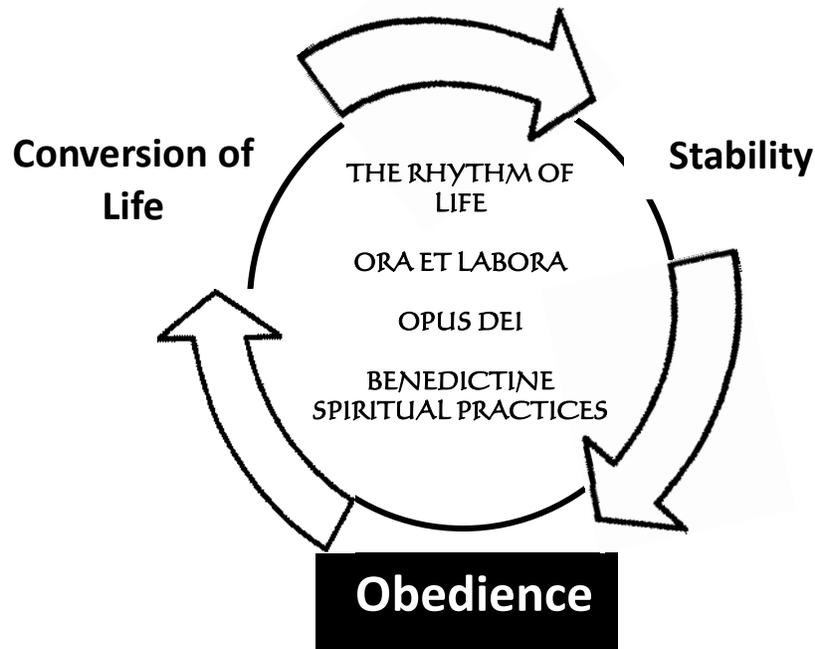
## Brief summary of past sessions :

How was walking/using the labyrinth? Personal discoveries, stories, difficulties

The rhythm of the heart and Stability - Any further thoughts?

Introduction to discernment: connecting the "Opus Dei" and the "Ora et Labora"

## Benedictine cycle:



## Introduction to Discernment:

Etymology: Latin: *dis*—apart + *cernere*—sift = *discernere*—to sift apart, separate, distinguish, discriminate; also to perceive; from Greek: *krinein*—to decide, separate (same root as *kriter*—judge (which gives us the word criteria.)

### Some examples:

- Cleaning of the beans

### Discernment is:

- More than making a decision
- More than distinguishing right from wrong
- More than differentiating true from false
- ***It is mainly a way to recognize, perceive or understand what is otherwise hidden, to see more deeply than is ordinary***

## Discernment in the Bible:

Precondition for good discernment:

- Spiritual insight— Prayerful life
- Cultural discernment—able to read the signs of the times (being prophetic)
- Skillful decision-making techniques—Leadership & Commitment

We must all listen to the Lord's directives :

"Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."  
Ephesians 5:15-17

God wants His children to be alert, perceptive, wise, and discriminatory. We must not be ostriches, with our heads in the sand; rather, we must be eagles with extraordinary spiritual vision.

### What is the essence of biblical discernment?

- **Biblical discernment is the ability to see life as God sees it.**
  - + Discernment is both moral and mental
  - + It views life, with its values and choices, from a God-centered point of view
  - + It is an ethical understanding which keeps us in touch with the Holy mind of God
  - + It looks at each situation within the eternal creative-redemptive purpose of God
  - + We achieve it through humble, prayerful submission to God. "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God ." (Colossians 1:9-10)
  - + Such discernment affects thought, feeling, behavior, and choices.
- **Biblical Discernment is the ability to be led by the Holy Spirit.**
  - + "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God ." (*Romans 8:14*) One evidence of spiritual sonship is the guidance of the Spirit.
  - + Apart from the illuminating ministry of the Spirit, we can neither know nor implement the mind of God in our lives.
  - + No person, no matter how perceptive his sense and how high his IQ, can imagine or understand divine truth.

"Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him. these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God."  
(*1 Corinthians 2:6-11*)

- + God has revealed what is necessary for life and godliness through the Spirit in the inspired Scriptures.
  - + In order to understand it, we must be responsive to the teaching ministry of the Spirit. “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.” (*1 Co. 2:12-13*)
  - + When we do, we are able to examine all things. “Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else’s scrutiny.” (*1 Co. 2:15*)
  - + We then have the ability to measure life and its decisions against the absolute standard of revealed truth.
- **Biblical Discernment is the ability to apply common sense acquired through life experiences.**
    - + We learn it in "the school of hard knocks."
    - + We gain it by practice in making both good and bad decisions.
    - + It involves study, research, counsel, maturity, and logic.
    - + It involves time, truth, and the tests of life.
    - + The fires of opposition and criticism will purify the ability to discern. “In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (*1 Peter 1:6-7*)  
“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord. (*James 1:2-8*)
    - + ***Such discernment is the ability to ask the right questions at the right time in the right way to achieve the right solution.***
  - **Biblical discernment must be distinguished from negative criticism.**
    - + We must all develop the habits of proper critical thinking without becoming emotionally critical people.
    - + In criticism, we use negative, subjective bias, whereas in discernment, we seek an understanding of truth regardless of its source.
    - + Discernment is both positive and objective.
    - + Christ rebuked the religious leaders of Israel because they failed to discern the signs of their times. “The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test Jesus they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” Then he left them and went

away." (*Matthew 16:1-4*)

- + In their prejudice toward Him, they chose not to evaluate His ministry objectively.
- **Biblical Discernment is the ability to examine yourself before we judge Others.**
  - + Self examination is a prerequisite for partaking of the Lord's Supper. Those who judge themselves will not be judged. (*1Corinthians 11:28, 31*)
  - + "Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test!" (*2 Corinthians 13:5*)
  - + We should not have a lower standard for ourselves than we do for others.
  - + After proper self-examination, we will be in a better position to discern the virtues and the faults of others.
  - + We all make decisions every day; some are of little significance; others are life-changing.
  - + As we seek to glorify God in all that we do, we must apply the biblical principles of discernment in all areas of our life experience.

### Areas of Discernment

- **Between truth and error**—"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world." (*1 John 4:1*)
  - + We must examine all of the doctrinal statements made from the pulpit, in a classroom, in a book, over the radio, or on television.
  - + We must evaluate all such statements in the light of the clear truth of the inspired Word of God: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (*John 17:17*).
- **Between right and wrong**... "Ah, you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (*Isaiah 5:20*)
  - + We live in a culture that constantly challenges our understanding of "good common life" and often considers Biblical family values as "old-fashioned"
  - + We must ethically evaluate the media which impacts our lives, relationships, families, and churches. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil." (*1Thessalonians 5:21-22*)
- **Between the good and the best**..."to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless."(*Philippians 1:10*)
  - + We often have several choices which are within the moral will of God, and yet, we can only make one of those choices.
  - + Of course, such questions may not be directly answered in the Scriptures.
- **Between liberty and legalism**..."So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God" (*1 Corinthians 10:31-32*)
  - + We must manifest in our lives what God is, and we must do it without giving offence.
  - + What does offense" mean? It doesn't mean that we must always give in to the viewpoints of those with whom we disagree?
  - + We must love and edify one another. However, we must not submit to the pressure of legalists who would impose their personal preferences upon us, passing them off as moral mandates.
  - + Rather, we must distinguish between living under the standard of divine grace and living

under the standard of man-made restrictions.

#### **Four principles to consider in a biblical approach to understanding the will of God in decision making**

- **First, the principle of obedience to God's will as revealed in the Scriptures.** The will of God is good, acceptable, and perfect (*Romans 12:2*).
- **Second, the principle of freedom**—where believers are free and responsible to choose any course of action within the moral will of God.
- **Third, the principle of wisdom**—where a believer makes wise decisions based upon the Bible, research, counsel, and life experiences.
- **Fourth, the principle of humility**—where a believer recognizes that God's sovereign will may overrule his understanding of the situation.

#### **We should us ask these questions:**

- Will I become more godly through my decision (is it good)?
- Will my decision bring moral gratification (is it acceptable)?
- Will my decision stretch me and cause me to realize my full potential for the Lord (will it perfect or mature me)?

#### **Ignatian discernment or “discernment of spirits”**

- “Sifting apart” spirits from God vs. not from God (note: spirits refers broadly to inner promptings, desires, etc. that may or may not be prompted by the Holy Spirit)
- It always includes evaluation of circumstances, options, values, goals, and whatever else we can know through reason informed by faith.

#### **Three Central Features of Ignatian Discernment**

- **Holistic**— A Christian approach to “decision-making” = holistic. Term “decision-making” is more modern than Christian. “Decisions” are merely the tip of the iceberg or the fruit growing on a tree with an intricate root system.
  - + At the root of decisions = *the moral and spiritual character/identity of the person who makes the decision*. A bad tree tends to bear bad fruit and good tree tends to bear good fruit.
  - + The whole person includes the head, heart, body, and soul of the person.
  - + “Reason” is not limited to the “reasoning head” but includes the “reasoning heart”. Formal logic must be integrated with imaginative and “affective” (feeling-based) judgments based upon “aesthetic logic”. Aesthetic criteria include, for example: Sense of **self**: “Who am I?” What is my most authentic story?
  - + Interpretation and evaluation of events through **Christian stories and symbols** (especially those in the Bible).
  - + Sense of **analogy** to Christian exemplars, especially Jesus Christ: Does this action or this affection correlate to those of Jesus? Does it catch the “rhyme” of his life?  
**Prayer life**: “Does this fit with my ongoing relationship with God in prayer?”
- **Focused on Character Formation**—One needs to develop good moral and spiritual character to make morally and spiritually good decisions. Christian tradition has focused on formation of the person by disposing one to habitually make good choices and perform good actions in “everyday” matters. Virtues are dispositions to choose and act well; vices are dispositions to

do the opposite. *Christian* virtues dispose one toward right relationship with God, neighbor, and self and away from sin. The more deeply a Christian has internalized the Christian story the better equipped she will be to recognize what actions are most appropriate to that story in concrete situation.

#### **Tools for Character Formation.**

**Prayer**—listening and talking to God; coming to *know oneself*--one's sinful tendencies and one's gifts--in relationship to the source and goal of one's being, i.e., God

**Scriptures**—listening to, reciting, singing, praying with, and studying the authoritative revelation of God and our relationship to God

**Tradition**—participating in a way of life embodied in stories, practices (including prayer), attitudes, worldview, etc. handed over from one generation to another.

**Reason**—developing the skill of disciplined, logical reflection on the order of God's creation

**Experience**—learning from what you and others have lived through

#### **Next Steps:**

- **Walking the neighborhood**

#### **FINAL PRAYER**

*In the business of this day*

*Grant me stillness of seeing, O God.*

*In the conflicting voices of my heart*

*Grant me a calmness of hearing.*

*Let me seeing and hearing*

*My words and my actions*

*Be rooted in a silent certainty of your presence.*

*Let my passion for life*

*And the longing for justice that stir within me*

*Be grounded in the experience of your stillness.*

*Let my life be rooted in the ground of your peace, O God,*

*Let me be rooted in the depths of your peace.*

## Discerning your Neighborhood's Signs of Wellness and Un-wellness

- Pray for your neighborhood and that you will see during your journey through your neighborhood.
- Walk your neighborhood with a sense of full presence and intentionality. You can do this as an individual or with a group.
- As you walk around the neighborhood, look for signs of physical, social, economic, spiritual and ecological wellness & un-wellness.

Describe briefly these signs of wellness:

Physical

Social

Economic

Spiritual

Ecological

Describe briefly these signs of un-wellness:

Physical

Social

Economic

Spiritual

Ecological