

Intro to Discernment of Spirits - Part 1

Apostles of the Interior Life

Introduction

God speaks to us first and foremost through Scripture and through the Church. He also speaks through the events of life and through the interior movements in our soul (thoughts, emotions and desires).

Discernment: (from the Latin *discernere*) means separating things according to their qualities. In this case we want to divide, to sift through thoughts, emotions and desires into two categories: the ones that come from God and the ones that do not originate in Him.

Spirits: the word used by St. Ignatius to refer to interior movements.

Three-Fold Ignatian Paradigm:

1. Become aware of what is moving in our hearts
2. Understand the origin of such affective movements
3. Act upon them by rejecting or accepting them.

BECOME AWARE

Become aware of your thoughts, feelings, and desires. Notice if they are physical, psychological or spiritual.

Examples of:

- physical consolation: eating your favorite food.
- psychological consolations: the peace that we experience at the sight of a sunset;
- spiritual consolations: enthusiasm at the idea of sharing my faith with others

Examples of:

- physical desolation: being ill or tired.
- psychological desolations: sadness for a failure
- spiritual desolations: heaviness of heart because I think that God can't forgive me.

Where do these spiritual consolations and desolations come from?

UNDERSTAND

At the spiritual level desolations come from the evil spirit, whereas consolations come from the good spirit.

With evil spirit St. Ignatius means basically three things:

- our weak nature, wounded by original sin and struggling with concupiscence;
- the world around us with his negative inputs;
- the devil, who takes advantage of both our weaknesses and of the world's wrong values.

With good spirit he means

- God, and His angels
- the means God uses (an event, a person speaking to us, a book, etc) to influence us in a positive way.

There are three agents that interact in the process of discernment:

1. Myself 2. God and His Spirit 3. The enemy's spirit

In his first 14 rules of the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius explains how to recognize if an interior movement comes from the good or evil spirit and how to act upon them.

The first rule: In those who are moving away from God, going from mortal sin to mortal sin

Evil spirit gives fake peace and pleasures

Good Spirit bites and causes turmoil

The second rule: In those who are moving towards God, going from good to better

Evil spirit bites and places obstacles

Good Spirit gives true peace and strength