

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Discerning the Will of God"



"What does God want me to do?" This question, simply put, is at the heart of discernment. This question is also at the heart of the Salesian tradition.

Discernment presumes at least four things:

- ◆ God exists
- ◆ God is near to me
- ◆ God has a will or desire for me
- ◆ I can come to know God's will.

The Salesian tradition describes discernment as the experience of living between the "two wills of God."

God's *signified* will is that which God *is* communicating in *general* through the Commandments and Counsels found in Scripture; the authority and teaching of the Church; the lived experience and tradition of the Christian faithful; the inspiration of the Spirit; the duties of one's state, or vocation, in life.

So, if you are married and raising a family, for example, God's *signified* will for you would include such things as: living a life of virtue; honoring your father and mother; keeping holy the Sabbath; believing that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist; nourishing your relationship with your spouse; raising your children in the faith.

God's *permissive* will is the experience of deciding how best to live in *particular* through the real events, circumstances, relationships and responsibilities of daily life. Is today the day you confront a co-worker about an earlier dispute? Do you accept – or decline – this job offer? What do your children need from you at this moment? Which nursing home is best for your ailing father? Where is your relationship with your spouse most in need of attention? Should you make time to perform volunteer work?

Discernment is the process of being open to how God's *signified* will (or "good pleasure") is inviting you to embrace God's *permissive* will in ways that are appropriate – and even required – by the circumstances, relationships and events in which you find yourself. Put another way, discernment is about choosing how best to respond to God's will, desires and longings for you now, today, this moment. What is the *best*, or, what are some *better* ways, of imitating the example of Christ in this particular moment, circumstance or event, no matter how serious or commonplace?

How do you know what is better or best? Develop the ability to listen. Develop the ability to

filter out the external and internal "static" of your life. Recognize that the most pressing things are not always the most important. Realize, too, that the most important things must sometimes wait for the most pressing. Focus on how God may be speaking through your family, friends, or co-workers. Pay attention to the demands and responsibilities of your state and stage in life, both the planned and the unexpected. Personal prayer, the reading of Scripture, celebrating the Eucharist, employing the assistance of a spiritual director, and experiencing the sacrament of Reconciliation can help you to sharpen your hearing.

Discernment never occurs in a vacuum. It always takes place within the context of your relationship with God, yourself, others. One of the most powerful forums for fruitful discernment is with trusted friends who can support you in the practice of virtue: doing what is right and just in the eyes of God.

Above all, regardless of the ease or difficulty with which you discern God's will, place your confidence and trust in God's presence. Even when you can't see, hear or feel God's voice, the Creator is with you.

Always.