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## Dis-cern-ment

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## Dis-cern-ment

A dictionary can offer us a proper pronunciation of the word discernment, and provide specific definitions. My interests are in reflecting upon our own personal experiences of decision-making that relate to discernment.

When we make decisions about matters where we do not yet know which might be the better way for us to proceed, we usually have to work at discriminating between apparent goods, as well as possible negative consequences. Whether or not we use the words in our internal dialogs, we might make use of several additional “dis” processes. For example, we discover, by personal research, whatever information we need for making our decisions. We disapprove of avoiding the issue at hand, or engaging in denial. We dismantle illogical reasoning that is either presented to us, as in much of advertising, or that might occur to us because of our own preferences. In summary, our discernment always involves making clear for ourselves the division of one side from another, with the reasonable belief that in many situations we can have one or the other, but not both options.

Most of would like to have more certainty about the decisions we make than is humanly possible. We can never be sure that we have all the relevant facts in our possession, and we certainly cannot know ahead of time all the consequences that will follow upon our decisions. But if we cannot be sure of every aspect of any particular choice that is ours to make, certainty about our values and intentions is quite possible. Even more, we can completely rely on God to be with us in our discernment, to be within our thoughts and their accompanying feelings. Inspiration does not provide us with certainty as to consequences, but provides us with courage to engage fully in our exercise of discernment.

Internal or external conditions that diminish our freedom also inhibit our capacity for discernment. Because our “yes” or “no” is of so much significance, we want to do all we can to bring ourselves to a state of true freedom. We are subject to many kinds of influences, such as demands from persons and circumstances, which can temporarily prevent us from engaging in discernment. And, whenever a decision-making process elicits some fear or anger, we have to appropriately deal with our own internal movements.

We have within us the means to actively seek the freedom we desire in order to exercise our present capacity for doing discernment. First, we can acknowledge that we are not yet prepared to decide, that we have to metaphorically bring the car out of the garage before we can take the trip; we begin with an honest evaluation of our readiness for decision-making. At any time, we can “talk to ourselves,” consciously setting aside unreasonable

pushes and pulls from within ourselves as well as from outside influences. We can also communicate with God about our desires for freedom from those thoughts and feelings that are proving obstacles to our discernment. When we are ready, we will know that we can consider all the relevant factors without undue influence from any source. We can complete the discernment by forming our essential "yes" or "no," which we verify within our minds and hearts, and then finally enact.

Discernment: a gift and a grace that grows and matures through continual exercise – spiritual exercise.