

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

SEARCHING GOD'S WILL



SUNDAY READINGS:

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Psalms 63:2-6, 8-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

ACTIVE DISCERNMENT IS ESSENTIAL

In today's short second reading (Romans 12:1-2), one phrase deserves deep reflection as it relates to living a fruitful Christian life. Saint Paul speaks about the necessity to "discern what is the will of God" so as to appreciate "what is good and pleasing and perfect."

Discernment is an active, prayerful process of seeking to discover God's will for one's life and for the wider society. It involves prayer and silence, scripture reflection, Church teaching, Mass and the sacraments, as well as spiritual reflection. Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Jesuits, gifted the Church with a deeper understanding of this process. Pope Francis, the first-ever Jesuit Pope, expressed many deep insights into discernment in his 2013 *Evangelii Gaudium* [EG] (The Joy of the Gospel).

Francis' View. In several places in EG Pope Francis expresses his insights on the imperatives facing the Church as it practices an "ever watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times" (51). What Francis envisions is a genuine "evangelical discernment" which is "the approach of a missionary disciple" (50). "We need to distinguish clearly what might be a fruit of the kingdom from what runs counter to God's plan. This involves not only recognizing and discerning spirits, but also—and this is decisive—choosing movements of the spirit of good and rejecting those of the spirit of evil" (51).

The Pope is clearly aware of “today’s vast and rapid cultural changes that demand we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness” (41). Francis goes on to assert that in “her ongoing discernment” of current signs and trends, the Church will realize that some customs and practices “may be beautiful, but they no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them” (43).

Pivotal Issues. In a later section, Francis notes: “I intend to concentrate on two great issues which strike me as fundamental at this time in history. I will treat them more fully, because I believe that they will shape the future of humanity. These issues are: first, the inclusion of the poor in society, and second, peace and social dialogue” (185). To address these signs, Francis enunciates several principles which he believes are foundational for “building a people in peace, justice and fraternity” (221-237).

Francis was not overwhelmed by current realities. He asserted: “The evils of our world—and those of the Church—must not be excuses for diminishing our commitment and our fervor. Let us look upon them as challenges which can help us to grow” (84). “Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment” (109).

Conclusion. Time and again, *Evangelii Gaudium* provides a profound faith-perspective which assists Christians in discerning “signs” and in living their commitment as missionary disciples. Francis boldly states: “In our time humanity is experiencing a turning-point in its history” (52). “Seeing reality with the eyes of faith, we cannot fail to acknowledge what the Holy Spirit is sowing” (68). Undoubtedly, genuine discernment results in deepened faith.

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-9

The unique Old Testament Book of Jeremiah contains both the prophet's messages as well as his own personal diary. Today's reading records his very intimate thoughts about God and his own personal struggles. We hear how Jeremiah, close to despair, says that God tricked him into being a prophet, making him "an object of laughter" so that "everyone mocks me." For Jeremiah, his prophetic task becomes like "fire burning in my heart."

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 63:2-6, 8-9

Today's psalm expresses deep confidence in God, a quality that Jeremiah obviously needed. Even in times of doubt, we can still strive to praise God, saying with the psalmist: "O God, you are my God whom I seek.... For your kindness is a greater good than life.... With exultant lips my mouth shall praise you."

Second Reading: Romans 12:1-2

In today's reading Saint Paul rather bluntly says to his hearers: "Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." To achieve this goal requires an active discernment of God's will. It demands frequently praying in faith, as Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but your will be done."

Remarkably, these words of Jesus appear in all three Synoptic Gospels (Mt 26:39, Mk 14:36, Lk 22:42).

Gospel: Matthew 16:21-27

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus predicting his death in Jerusalem. It is a message that the disciples do not wish to hear. Jesus forcefully calls Peter "Satan," because he is only thinking and judging by human standards. Each of us should honestly admit that we need deep transformation to think, judge, and act with Jesus' values and perspectives to find authentic, everlasting life. Realistically, this means taking up our cross daily, carrying it along with Jesus.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who recently published three short, meditative books: ► **Living in Joyful Hope**, ► **Exploring Vatican II Treasures**, and ► **A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis** (www.faithalivebooks.com).

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