



MI MONTHLY FORMATION (4)
In Fr. Kolbe's Marian and Missionary Spirituality

APRIL 2006 PRAYER INTENTION:
**That, like you, we make Christ's resurrection the heart
of our faith and of our work to announce the Gospel.**

Dear Friends,

In my missionary experience of accompanying people in their desire and effort to deepen their personal relationship with God and with Our Lady, I often hear these crucial questions: If holiness consists in doing God's will, how do I discover it for me? How can Mary of Nazareth be my model since she lived in a time and situation completely different from mine and, by the way, she is the Mother of God? Interesting questions indeed!

This month we want to explore **DISCERNMENT AS THE MEETING POINT OF PRAYER AND ACTION** in our lives of apostolic Christians and MIers so that we might more effectively lead all men to God through the Immaculata.

DEFINITION

In looking for a definition of discernment, we find that it is both a skill and an act, in particular: Discernment is

- *A power to see what is not evident to the average mind. Discernment stresses accuracy and the ability to distinguish and select what is true or appropriate or excellent*
- *A searching mind that goes beyond what is obvious or superficial. It implies penetration combined with keen practical judgment.*

In a more spiritual sense, to *discern*, from the Latin *discernere* - to separate things according to their qualities, to distinguish between one thing and another - means to identify and name different spiritual realities.

The three key steps in discernment are: **become aware, understand and take action.**

THE FIRST STEP: BE AWARE

Presuming that the discerning person is a praying person, that is, one who takes God seriously and genuinely desires that God lead his life, what is the basic attitude which helps along in actually understanding God's will? If spiritual discernment is the art of finding God's will in life's concrete situations which confront us, we need to listen to those through whom God speaks: the Pope, the Bishop, the Pastor, civil authorities, parents, etc. But first, we need to become aware of what is happening around us and especially within us. How aware are we of our interior spiritual experience, God's action within our soul?

The first step, then, is to notice what is stirring in our hearts and thoughts with reference to our life of faith and our pursuit of God's will.

SECOND STEP: UNDERSTAND

Our intelligence, sensibility and experience help us to reflect on what we have noticed and to understand the meaning of the affective patterns we have become aware of. The constant effort of a

prayerful pondering brings us to acquire a clear perception of the origin and direction of what is moving in our hearts and minds, providing us with the basic light to follow readily the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

THIRD STEP: TAKE ACTION

Awareness and understanding are aimed toward action. Only after having become aware and having correctly interpreted the nature of what we are experiencing or dealing with, we can take the appropriate action of accepting what is of God and firmly rejecting what is not, i.e. to accept what encourages our adherence to the will of God and reject what may weaken this adherence.

This three-fold process is very helpful in making healthy and fruitful decisions both in small daily issues and in lifelong vocational choices. If we learn to become aware and to understand deeply our feelings and thoughts, their origin and direction, then we will make better choices which will impact positively our life and the lives of others.

IMITATING MARY, THE DISCERNING VIRGIN

As we see in the dialogues of the Annunciation and the Visitation in St. Luke's Gospel, Mary is **aware** of her people's suffering and of their spiritual longing for the Messiah. She is aware of God's presence and work in their midst throughout the history of Israel. She is aware of her lowliness and powerlessness; of her being loved and saved; chosen and sent. Moreover, she is able to grasp the **meaning** of events and words, both of the present and of the past; that are taking place in her life and in the lives of other people; and **to act** accordingly.

In the General Audience on January 29, 1997, John Paul II said that

“**Mary's awareness** that she was carrying out a task entrusted to her by God gave a higher meaning to her daily life. The simple, humble chores of everyday life took on special value in her eyes, since she performed them as a service to Christ's mission. Mary's example enlightens and encourages the experience of so many women who carry out their daily tasks exclusively in the home. It is a question of a humble, hidden, repetitive effort, and is often not sufficiently appreciated. Nonetheless, the long years Mary spent in the house of Nazareth reveal the enormous potential of genuine love and thus of salvation. In fact, the simplicity of the lives of so many housewives, seen as a mission of service and love, is of extraordinary value in the Lord's eyes. One can certainly say that for Mary life in Nazareth was not dominated by monotony. In her contact with the growing Jesus, she strove to penetrate the mystery of her Son through contemplation and adoration. St. Luke says: *'Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart'* (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51). *'All these things'*: they are the events in which she was both participant and spectator, starting with the Annunciation; but above all, it is the life of her Child. Every day of intimacy with him is an invitation to know him better, to discover more deeply the meaning of his presence and the mystery of his person.

(...) In the dignified and hard-working atmosphere of Nazareth, Mary strove to **understand** the workings of Providence in her Son's mission. A subject of particular reflection for his Mother, in this regard, was certainly the statement Jesus made in the temple of Jerusalem when he was 12 years old: *'Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'* (Lk 2: 49). Meditating on this, Mary could better understand the meaning of Jesus' divine sonship and her own motherhood, as she endeavored to discern in her Son's conduct the traits revealing his likeness to the One he called 'my Father'" (#2-3).

Dear friends, let us strive every day to improve our relationship and intimacy with God in prayer, by listening attentively to his word and to the needs of those who are close to us; by lifting our minds and hearts in a docile response to his love; and by searching for and doing God's will through daily discernment. In this way, we will gradually become "contemplative in action," people who, like Mary, let themselves be guided by the Spirit in every event and thus can say "*it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...*" (Galatians 2:20b), through the Immaculata.

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RESOURCES FOR FURTHER DEEPENING THE THEME

Church's Teaching

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

2688 The catechesis of children, young people, and adults aims at teaching them to meditate on the Word of God in personal prayer, practicing it in liturgical prayer, and internalizing it at all times in order to bear fruit in a new life. Catechesis is also a time for the discernment and education of popular piety. The memorization of basic prayers offers an essential support to the life of prayer, but it is important to help learners savor their meaning.

2689 Prayer groups, indeed "schools of prayer," are today one of the signs and one of the driving forces of renewal of prayer in the Church, provided they drink from authentic wellsprings of Christian prayer. Concern for ecclesial communion is a sign of true prayer in the Church.

2690 The Holy Spirit gives to certain of the faithful the gifts of wisdom, faith and discernment for the sake of this common good which is prayer (spiritual direction). Men and women so endowed are true servants of the living tradition of prayer.

2846 "*And lead us not into temptation.*" This petition goes to the root of the preceding one, for our sins result from our consenting to temptation; we therefore ask our Father not to "lead" us into temptation. It is difficult to translate the Greek verb used by a single English word: the Greek means both "do not allow us to enter into temptation" and "do not let us yield to temptation." "God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one"; on the contrary, he wants to set us free from evil. We ask him not to allow us to take the way that leads to sin. We are engaged in the battle "between flesh and

spirit"; this petition implores the Spirit of discernment and strength.

2847 The Holy Spirit makes us discern between trials, which are necessary for the growth of the inner man, and temptation, which leads to sin and death. We must also discern between being tempted and consenting to temptation. Finally, discernment unmasks the lie of temptation, whose object appears to be good, a "delight to the eyes" and desirable, when in reality its fruit is death. God does not want to impose the good, but wants free beings.... There is a certain usefulness to temptation. No one but God knows what our soul has received from him, not even we ourselves. But temptation reveals it in order to teach us to know ourselves, and in this way we discover our evil inclinations and are obliged to give thanks for the goods that temptation has revealed to us.

"Let us not lament if we suffer from some natural defect of body or mind: from poor memory, slowness of understanding, little ability, lameness or general bad health. Who knows? Perhaps if God had given us greater talent, better health, a more personable appearance, we might have lost our souls!"

St. Alphonsus Liguori

For Reflection:

God's ways are not our ways. That which we consider trial or inconvenience is often a route that leads to our salvation. What is an area of personal discouragement for you? How does this quote from St. Alphonsus Liguori give you a deeper insight into the movements of the heart - especially in that area of discouragement?

Prayer

O Most Immaculate, Most Holy and Most Pure Beautiful Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament, I consecrate myself to you this day. I want to imitate you, a woman who seeks God's will. Help me, Mother, to see my worth, purpose and dignity as a Godly woman. You knew and lived the Word. You carried the Word in your womb. Nourish my heart as you nourished your Son in your womb. I open my heart to you and your Son at this very moment, so that your truth, mercy and love are within me. Blessed Mother in heaven, dry my tears, caress my cheeks, and hold me as you did Jesus. Pray for me, Blessed Mother, that wearing my miraculous medal will remind me of my worth, whom I belong to, and help me to live in the dignity that was given to me at my conception. Truly, I give myself to you this day and always. Please use me, Blessed Mother, to help bring others to your Son in Eucharistic Adoration. I praise, love, adore, and worship your Son who resides in Tabernacles throughout the world. Amen.

Yolanda Rodriguez

Testimony of a discerning heart

Sundays are truly extraordinary days. I look forward to Sunday morning Mass as a time for intimate communion with the Lord. The majesty of the Mass never ceases to touch my heart and elevate my soul. From the entrance of the priest to the final dismissal, I pay careful attention; I endeavor to enter the Mass.

There was a time, in my younger years, when I used to get upset when I heard a baby cry during Mass. To me, crying babies were nothing more than irritating distractions that took me away from "my Mass."

Today, with the scourge of abortion running rampant in California, whenever I hear a baby cry I thank God for the gift of that child. I thank God for the father, who stands as the head of the household, protecting and providing for his family. I thank God for the Mother, the heart of the family that bore the child in her womb. The crying child is a reminder of the goodness of God and the love of a husband for his wife, and a wife for her husband. Oh, I realize that there are some who would say, "Well, that's great, but what about the unwanted child, or the child of the crack-addicted mother, who is to care for them?" To them I say that there are thousands of families who would do anything to have that child's voice heard - families willing to adopt.

*In Corde Matris,
Victor R. Claveau, M.J.*

MI Youth-Beat

From Benedict XVI

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119 [118]:105)

My dear young friends!

... World Youth Day this year will be celebrated in the local Churches, and it will be a good opportunity to rekindle the flame of enthusiasm that was awakened in Cologne ... The theme that I suggest to you is a verse from Psalm 119 [118]: *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (v. 105)... God reveals himself in history. He speaks to humankind, and the word he speaks has creative power. The Hebrew concept *"dabar,"* usually translated as "word," really conveys both the meaning of *word* and *act*. God says what he does and does what he says... My dear young friends, love the word of God and love the Church, and this will give you access to a treasure of very great value and will teach you how to appreciate its richness. Love and follow the Church, for it has received from its Founder the mission of showing people the way to true happiness. It is not easy to recognize and find authentic happiness in this world in which we live, where people are often held captive by the current ways of thinking. They may think they are "free," but they are being led astray and become lost amid the errors or illusions of aberrant ideologies. "Freedom itself needs to be set free" (cf the encyclical [*Veritatis Splendor*](#), 86), and the darkness in which humankind is groping needs to be illuminated. Jesus taught us how this can be done: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (*Jn* 8:31-32). The incarnate Word, Word of Truth, makes us free and directs our freedom towards the good. My dear young friends, meditate often on the word of God, and allow the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. You will then discover that God's way of thinking is not the same as that of humankind's. You will find yourselves led to contemplate the real God and to read the events of history through his eyes. You will savor in fullness the joy that is born of truth. On life's journey, which is neither easy nor free of deceptions, you will meet difficulties and suffering and at times you will be tempted to exclaim with the psalmist: "I am severely afflicted" (*Ps* 119 [118]. v. 107). Do not forget to add as the psalmist did: "give me life, O Lord, according to your word... I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law" (*ibid.* vv. 107; 109). The loving presence of God, through his word, is the lamp that dispels the darkness of fear and lights up the path even when times are most difficult.

Message to the Youth, 2/22/06

Consecration in Action

Now that we have become more aware of the presence of God in our lives, we have opened our hearts and minds to the interior movements of the Spirit. Mature pray-ers are able to discern the stirrings of the heart and determine if they are from Our God or not. Here are a few simple guidelines: What are you thinking, feeling or telling

- Does it sound like Jesus?
Remember... WWJD [What Would Jesus Do]?
- Does it help you conform to the image of Christ? Christ lived His life for others and for the Father.
- Is it consistent with previous experiences that you know were from God? Our Lord usually moves us gradually in our state of life so that we can grow in His grace and have strength to rise to the next level of sanctity.
- Is it consistent with the fruit of the Spirit? These are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, and self-control.
- Is it consistent with the witness of the Saints? The Saints rose to the heights of sanctity because they conformed themselves to Christ and to Our Lady in their specific vocation and state of life.
- Do trusted friends and mentors agree this is from God? Though we may become confused when we consult too many "holy people," we should at least ask the advice of someone that is trained in spiritual direction.
- Is it consistent with the themes of Scripture and Tradition? Any movement of the heart that contradicts the truths of the written and unwritten words of God is not from God.

God's will can only be discerned if we remain humble, patient, and invest some time nurturing our relationship with God in prayer. Turn to a spiritual director to help you with this difficult but fruitful task.

By Rik Hernandez

Wisdom for our time

All too often we hear the complaint, "I keep praying to God, but nothing ever happens." Other times we admit, "I know I should be more charitable and generous, but I never seem to make much progress." Neither of these statements is cause for discouragement. By nature our works are always inferior to our desires. Our will to do good is sincere but, left to our own devices, accomplishing it is difficult.

Since we are very limited creatures, we often forget to include one very important element in our prayer. When we are confused, discouraged or undecided, we cannot always acknowledge or express these concerns even to ourselves. But this is when we should remember that only the Holy Spirit can penetrate our inner selves. He sees and understands areas of ourselves that are invisible to everyone else. Christ himself promised us, "The Spirit of Truth will teach you all things." This is why it is important to invoke the Holy Spirit as Teacher and Guide in all aspects of our lives. At our Confirmation we were endowed with His special gifts and virtues. Through these, the operation of the Holy Spirit can set our souls in motion, enlightening us to discern the will of God and strengthening us to set it in motion in our lives.

By Margaret Volpe

More Resources

Bible: Eph 5: 10, 17; Rom 12: 2

Marian: Lk 2: 19, 51b; Jn 2: 3

Benedict XVI, Message to the Youth in occasion of the 21st WYD, April 9, 2006 - at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/youth

CCC Part Four (2709-2719; 2746-2751)

MI General Statutes nn.6-7, 15

www.consecration.com

Thomas Green, *Weeds Among Wheat. Discernment: Where Prayer and Action Meet*, 1984

T. Gallagher, *Discernment of the Spirits*, 2005
Carlo Maria Martini, *Our Lady of Holy Saturday*, 2002

Fr. Luigi Faccenda, *Symbiosis: Contemplation and Action*, Immaculata Press, 1991

From the Writings of Fr. Faccenda, OFMConv.

Interior Life: a Symbiosis of Contemplation and Action

“In striving to practice a profound interior life, remember that you have a Mother who guides you, carries you and warms you with her immaculate heart, provided that you let yourself be modeled by her example, word and maternal rebukes, both in time of joy and in time of adversities.”

“The very nature of the consecration to the Immaculata invites us to cultivate a most profound interior life until we become ‘contemplative in action.’”

“To understand the reality of the symbiosis of contemplation and action it would be enough to meditate the Gospel of the Visitation. Mary’s trip to visit her cousin Elizabeth doesn’t divert her from being in God’s presence; rather, the journey becomes all the more fruitful because along the way she lives in intimate communion with God, in contemplation of God, recollected in prayer and always ready to do only His will.”

(Fr. Luigi Faccenda*, *The Disciple Took Mary into His Home*, 1996, page 72, 73)

* Fr. Faccenda, OFMConv. (1920-2005), is the Founder of the Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata.

Dates to Remember

- 9** PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD’S PASSION. WYD
- 10-15** Holy Week and Easter Triduum
- 13** HOLY THURSDAY evening: Mass of the Lord’s Supper
- 14** GOOD FRIDAY of the Lord’s Passion
- 15** HOLY SATURDAY
- 16** EASTER SUNDAY: THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD
- 17-22** OCTAVE OF EASTER
- 23** Divine Mercy Sunday

FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

Is Our Will Hers?

“Whatever we do, even though it were an act that surpassed heroism and would be capable of upsetting the foundations of evil in this world, will only have some value to the extent that our will agrees with hers, and through her with the will of God. It is the outpouring of our will into her will, then, that is important.

This is the essence of love that through the Immaculata love changes us into what God wills, which must consume us, and through us set the world on fire so that it be annihilated in him and that every evil be destroyed.”

In *Will to Love*, p. 124

Discussion corner

- How can you improve your relationship and intimacy with God in prayer?
- Do you take God seriously and genuinely desire that God lead you life?
- How aware are you of your interior spiritual experience, i.e. of God’s action within your soul?
- How can you acquire a clear perception of the origin and direction of what is spiritually moving in your hearts and minds?
- Will you be able to describe the awareness, understanding and actions of the Blessed Virgin Mary depicted in the Gospels?