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Discernment: A Faith-Filled Journey or Problematic Process?

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"According to the on line site, Dictionary.com, the word discernment has four viable meanings that relate to 'acuteness of judgment' or 'using keen insight.' The ability to discern, then, is a process in determining a potential outcome or judgment. Lately, discernment has become a 'hot' word for Catholics, in particular young Catholics, who are searching for their next step in life and their faith development."

Discernment: A Faith-Filled Journey or Problematic Process?

By: Jodi Rowland

According to the on line site, Dictionary.com, the word discernment has four viable meanings that relate to ‘acuteness of judgment’ or ‘using keen insight.’ The ability to discern, then, is a process in determining a potential outcome or judgment. Lately, discernment has become a ‘hot’ word for Catholics, in particular young Catholics, who are searching for their next step in life and their faith development.

Here in lies my personal dilemma. Being brought up within American education institutions in our American society produces an individual who strives for the best, seeking freedom and democracy. Clearly many positives come from this upbringing; yet there are potential negatives as well. The natural outcome of this upbringing is that one will continue to look for improvement, or with always “have one’s eye on the prize,” so to speak. With so much focus and attention on the outcome of one’s life or current situation, where is the concern for the here-and-now? In theological terms, American Catholics have parousiac fever! *When will hunger end? When will there be equality for all people?* It is a constant look to the future. Having this perspective permits one to be aware of the mission and message that Jesus proclaimed—the Kingdom of God—for both Heaven and earth. However, how does one draw the line between hope followed with good deeds and impatience?

On a personal level, I have a strong faith that I practice in daily life. My vocation is to help others find their path to God, helping them discern and grow in faith. (There it is again—that word *discernment*). Currently, I am a youth minister, am engaged, and

enjoy time with family and friends, and participate in extra-curricular activities. Where's the dilemma, then? The problematic lies within my being American and being Catholic. Ingrained deep within my psyche is a need to constantly improve myself. Overall, this tends to be a positive attribute. However, just when the scales of life seem to balance—career set, marriage on the way, friends and family all in unison—this is when my parousiac fever takes control. Having balance means no immediate attention drawn to solve a problem. No family member or friend needing consoling. No crisis at work to worry over. This brings my attention to the stillness happening in my life. While I briefly enjoy this quiet moment, I then begin to wonder *what's next?* The process of discernment takes over. I begin to fret over just about everything. I ask questions of myself, like *Do I really want to continue to be a youth minister?; Is this really where I want to see myself 5 years from now, 10 years from now?; Is getting married at age 24 what God truly wants for me?* All of these are good questions, but my concern is that I am not asking them for the right reason. Rather I am asking them out of the sheer need to have continuous conflict in my life, creating problems that I can in turn solve.

The dilemma seems not to rely directly in the process of discernment, in the asking of what God truly wants for me. Instead the problematic is within myself: seeking out discernment only when I find balance and harmony in my life. Without worry over others in my life, I then shift my focus to questioning my current faith state! *Am I living my life for God? Am I doing what God would want me to do?* Clearly this is a positive check and balance system within my faith development. However, I believe that I take this to an extreme, seeking out potential problems; instead of finding solace in my good deeds and works.



Solution offered: continue helping others, yet enjoy the quiet moments, and stop over analyzing. St. Paul, laden himself with parousiac fever, provided a message that finds harmony between contentment and discernment: “For we know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven. For in this tent we groan, longing to be further clothed with our heavenly habitation if indeed, when we take it off, we shall not be found naked” (2 Corinthians 5:1-3). While covered in earthly clothes we long for ‘heavenly habitation.’ In this longing we seek and find God, yet this longing only emerges from this earth dwelling. Without it we would not have the desire to seek out more, to discern, and to find what we are looking for—God.