



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

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[Multimedia]

Catechesis on Discernment. 11. *The confirmation of the good choice*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In the process of discernment, it is important to also remain attentive to the stage that immediately follows the decision taken, in order to either catch *the signs that confirm it* or those that disprove it. I have to make a decision, [so] I make the discernment, pro or con, my feelings, I pray... then this process ends and I make the decision and then comes that part where we have to be careful and see. Because in life some decisions are not good and there are signs that disprove them, while on the other hand, good ones are confirmed.

Indeed, we have seen how *time* is a fundamental criterion for recognizing God's voice amidst so many other voices. He alone is Lord of time: it is a hallmark of his originality, which differentiates him from imitations that speak in his name without actually doing so. One of the distinctive signs of the good spirit is the fact that it communicates *a peace that lasts in time*. If you consider more profoundly, then make the decision and this gives you a peace that lasts through time, this is a good sign and indicates that the path was good. A peace that brings harmony, unity, fervour, zeal. You come out of the in depth process better than when you entered it.

For example, if I make the decision to devote an extra half hour to prayer, and then I find that I live the other moments of the day better, that I am more serene, less anxious, I do my work with more

care and zest, and even relations with some difficult people become smoother... These are all important signs in favour of the goodness of the decision taken. Spiritual life is circular: the goodness of a choice benefits all areas of our lives. For it is participation in God's creativity.

We can recognize *some important aspects* that help us read the time after the decision as a possible *confirmation* of its goodness, because the subsequent period confirms the goodness of the decision. In some ways we have already encountered these important aspects in the course of these catecheses but now they find their further application.

A first aspect is whether the decision is seen as a possible sign of response to the Lord's love and generosity toward me. It is not born out of fear, not born of emotional blackmail or compulsion, but born out of *gratitude for the good received*, which moves the heart to live generously in relationship with the Lord.

Another important element is having a sense of *one's place in life* — that tranquillity, "I am in my place" — and feeling that you are part of a larger plan, to which one wishes to make a contribution. In Saint Peter's Square there are two precise points — the focal points of the ellipse — from which one can see Bernini's columns perfectly aligned. Similarly, a man can recognize that he has found what he is looking for when his day becomes more orderly, when he feels a growing integration among his many interests, when he establishes a proper hierarchy of importance, and when he is able to experience this with ease, facing the difficulties that arise with renewed energy and fortitude. These are signs that you have made a good decision.

Another good sign of confirmation, for example, is the fact of *remaining free* with regard to what has been decided, being willing to question it, even to give it up in the face of possible denials, trying to find in them a possible teaching from the Lord. This is not because he wants to deprive us of what we hold dear, but in order to live it with freedom, without attachment. Only God knows what is truly good for us. Possessiveness is the enemy of goodness and kills affection. Be attentive to this: possessiveness is the enemy of good, it kills affection. The many cases of violence in the domestic sphere, of which we unfortunately have frequent news, almost always arise from the claim of possessing the affection of the other, from the search for absolute security that kills freedom and stifles life, making it hell.

We can only love in freedom, which is why the Lord created us free, free even to say no to him. Offering him what we hold most dear is in our best interest, enabling us to live it in the best possible way and in truth, as a gift he has given us, as a sign of his gratuitous goodness, knowing that our lives, as well as the whole of history, are in his benevolent hands. It is what the Bible calls the *fear of God*, that is, respect for God — not that God frightens me, no, but a respect, an indispensable condition for accepting the gift of Wisdom (cf. *Sir* 1:1-18). It is the fear that casts out all other fears, because it is oriented to he who is Lord of all things. In his presence, nothing can disquiet us.

It is the wondrous experience of Saint Paul, which he expressed in this way: “I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (*Phil. 4:12-13*). This is the free man, who blesses the Lord both when good things come and when not-so-good things come: May he be blessed, and let us go forward!

Recognizing this is critical to good decision-making, and it reassures us about what we cannot control or predict: health, the future, loved ones, our plans. What matters is that our trust is placed in the Lord of the universe, who loves us immensely and knows that we can build with him something wonderful, something eternal. The lives of the saints show us this in the most beautiful way. Let us go forward, always trying to make decisions in this way, in prayer and feeling what’s going on in our hearts, and going forward slowly. Take courage!

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from Australia, India, Singapore and the United States of America. I pray that each of you, and your families, may experience a blessed Advent in preparation for the coming, at Christmas, of the newborn Jesus, Son of God and Saviour of the world. God bless you!

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to *young people*, to *the sick*, to *the elderly* and to *newlyweds* who are many! Tomorrow is a beautiful day. It is the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. With a gaze turned to the Virgin Mary, always be daring in promoting the values of the spirit. Let us ask her, the sweetest of mothers, to comfort those who are suffering due to the brutality of war, especially martyred Ukraine. Let us pray for these martyred people who are suffering so much.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on discernment, we now turn to the signs that confirm the rightness of our decisions. The most important of these is the test of time. Decisions wisely discerned give rise to lasting peace. The spiritual life is “circular”: our decisions, as the fruit of our interior freedom and openness to God’s will, bring goodness, harmony and integration into our daily lives, our relationships and our work. A further sign of a spiritually sound decision is the conviction that it was in fact freely chosen out of love for God and in grateful response to his grace. The wisdom and rightness of our decisions is also confirmed by an increased sense of tranquillity, order and direction in our lives. For true wisdom, as the Bible teaches and the example of the saints bears witness, is born of the fear of God, the confident

assurance that our lives are in his hands and that our human freedom finds its supreme fulfilment in trusting obedience to his will.

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