

St. Joseph: The Silent Teacher of Discernment

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Abstract

St Pope John Paul II had a genuine quest: “How can we form priests who are truly able to respond to the demands of our times and capable of evangelizing the world of today?” The author reflects on the meaning of discernment and uses the image of St Joseph and his life’s mission to find ways to reach discernment. Discernment calls for silence, humility, readiness to surrender one’s interests to God’s plan. Nine Lessons from Joseph’s Discernment are discussed in the article.

Keywords: Discernment, St. Joseph, Formation

Introduction: The Quest and the Question

“How can we form priests who are truly able to respond to the demands of our times and capable of evangelizing the world of today?” This genuine quest and question of St Pope John Paul II to make the formation of the priests relevant prompted him to convene the Bishops’ Synod in 1990 and consequently to give the Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV)* in 1992. To form the priests after the heart of Jesus and to make the formation process evangelization focused, the answer of Pope John Paul II was learning the art of Gospel discernment (*PDV*. 1, 10). For Pope Francis, “priestly formation is a journey of transformation that renews the heart and mind of the person, so that he can discern what the will of God is, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Congregation of the Clergy, 2016, 43). “The time of the seminary is the time of discernment par excellence, in which, thanks to

the accompaniment of those that, like Eli with Samuel (Cf. 1 *Samuel* 3), help young people to recognize the voice of the Lord among the many voices that resound and at times thunder in the ears and the heart” (Francis, 2017).

Today more than ever, the call of the priest is to shepherd the believers in discerning the signs of the times and enabling them to distinguish the voice of God from confused voices with contrasting messages in the context of the plurality of cultural and religious sensibilities (Francis, 2017). The prime focus of formation shall be transforming a candidate into a person of discernment, enabling him to read the reality of human life in the light of the Spirit. Thus the future priest will be able to choose, decide and act according to the will of God (Congregation of the Clergy, 2016, 43). This has become all the more relevant in today’s challenging world of pastoral temptations and spiritual worldliness. That is why Pope Francis reiterates that priests shall develop a profound capacity for discernment (Rome Report in English, 2018).

Meaning of Discernment

The word “discernment” is a combination of two Latin words, dis, meaning “apart” and cernere meaning “to sift”. Hence, “to discern” means to sift through, to sort out, to distinguish. Discernment is differentiating the voice of God from other voices that instruct us what to do (Traüffer, Bekker, Bocârnea, & Winston, 2010). Discernment is the process of placing oneself before God to discover what God wants from a person or knowing God’s will for one’s life (Serraro, 2010). “Discernment is an inner search for an answer to the question of whether or not God is calling the individual to fulfill a specific role. It is a divine gift, characterized by an extraordinary instinct and capacity to know” (Traüffer, Bekker, Bocârnea, & Winston, 2010). Sister Mary Margaret Funk wrote, “This is discernment: to sort our thoughts and follow the impulse of grace given by the Holy Spirit ... We learn to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit rather than our own voice, self-talking to the self. The voice of the Holy Spirit is a dynamic voice that we hear and heed through our interior senses” (“Discernment and Dreams”, August 22, 2018).

According to Merton, discernment is the character of the mature Christian. “The presence of discernment and detachment is manifested by a spontaneous thirst for what is good—charity, union with the will of God—and an equally spontaneous repugnance for what is evil. The man who has this virtue no longer needs to be exhorted by promises

to do what is right, or deterred from evil by threat of punishment” (Merton, 1951). Richard Rohr states that a seeker of discernment has to leave the field open, a field in which God and grace can move. Ego leads with no whereas soul leads with yes (Head, 2013). Discernment is the process of developing eyes to see God in the midst of ordinary, finite existence and to let ourselves be moved by God. In the book, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*, Henri Nouwen explains discernment as “a spiritual understanding and experiential knowledge of how God is active in daily life that is acquired through disciplined spiritual practice.” (Nouwen, 2013) “Discernment is faithful living and listening to God’s love and direction so that we can fulfill our individual calling and shared mission” (Nouwen, 2013, Keary, 2020).

Ignatian Spirituality is directed at the world, the world beyond the self and the world beyond our primary experiences. It is inherently aimed at the common good and is therefore an interesting source when contemplating moral leadership (Nullens, 2018). “Gospel Discernment is the interpretation of the reality in the light and strength provided by the true and living Gospel, which is Jesus Christ, and in virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This Gospel discernment is based on trust in the love of Jesus Christ and is nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit who evokes everywhere and in all circumstances, obedience to the faith, the joyous courage of following Jesus, and the gift of wisdom, which judges all things and is judged by no one” (*PDV*, 10). Discernment proceeds based on faith and hope, not a certainty. Discerning one’s life according to the Gospel means cultivation every day a deep spiritual life, to receive it and interpret it with full responsibility, and growing trust in God, directing the heart towards Him each day. “To be experts in the art of discernment it is necessary to have first of all good familiarity with listening of the Word of God, but also a growing knowledge of oneself, of one’s interior world, of one’s affections and fears” (Francis, 2017). According to Pope Francis, to be people of discernment, courage, and boldness to tell the truth to oneself are needed. “Discernment is a choice of courage, contrary to the more comfortable and reductive ways of rigorism and of laxness” (Francis, 2017). Therefore, using Ignatian terminology, St. Joseph is the prototype for a ‘Contemplative in Action’ (Martinez, 2021).

Decision Making and Discernment

Although the terms, discernment and decision-making appear to be synonymous, there is a difference between them. In arriving at a

decision, we use our intelligence, examine our objectives and options, evaluate the choices, and decide the best possible alternative to meet our goal. On the other hand, Discernment is about listening and responding to our inner self where our deepest desires align with God's desire. Discernment calls for humility expressed as detachment from the agenda of oneself, which brings freedom expressed in creative decision-making. In discernment, "we sift through our impulses, motives, and options to discover which ones lead us closer to divine love and compassion for ourselves and other people and which ones lead us further away" (Nouwen, 2013).

Discernment is the way that believers seek the will of God for their lives, specifically to assist them in making decisions or finding directions in their journey. It grows out of a life lived with God, rather than a secular process of decision-making (Ratliff, 1997). Thus discernment goes beyond human intelligence and this work cannot be undertaken satisfactorily by relying only on his human resources. Discernment is the realm and activity of the Holy Spirit and a total act of faith in the Holy Spirit (PDV, No.1, 10). According to Pope Francis, "discernment is an exercise of spiritual intelligence, carried out by God's children who sees the traces of the Father's presence throughout history. Discernment is an art that does not provide standardized solutions" (Francis, 2019). "Discernment is a prayerful, informed, and intentional attempt to sort through these voices to get in touch with God's Spirit at work in a situation and to develop a sense of the direction in which the Spirit is leading. Discernment is more a journey than a destination" (Sims, 2017).

"Discernment reveals new priorities, directions, and gifts from God. We come to realize that what previously seemed so important for our lives loses its power over us. Our desire to be successful, well-liked and influential becomes increasingly less important as we move closer to God's heart" (Nouwen, 2013). Personal discernment occurs in dialogue with God, the self as grace, and the circumstances (Valiyakulathil, 2020). Francis of Assisi tells his brother to make the discernment of their lives than being a copy or imitation of someone. "No one showed me what I had to do..... "I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you what is yours!" (Rohr, 2018). The gift of divine grace empowers a person to rise above oneself, one's demands and external conditioning to living in the freedom of the children of God (GPV 43).

St. Joseph: The Silent Teacher

The vocation story of St. Joseph to be the husband of Mary and the guardian of Jesus is very unique in salvation history. He dedicated himself to serve the plan of salvation and made his life a genuine sacrificial offering to the mystery of the incarnation and its redemptive purpose. He turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of himself, listening to the voice of the Lord. His heart and all his abilities, his love, and his very life were placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home (Francis, 2020, *Patris Corde*). He becomes a role model to listen to the voice of the Lord and to make the proper discernment to prioritize the agenda of the Lord, setting aside one's personal interests. We can bring attention of Theory-U that goes to the inner center of our being which essential for the leadership qualities seen in St. Joseph; what really counts is where you're coming from, inside your deepest being: "the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener" (Scharmer 2016, p. 27).

In the scriptures Joseph is silent. By being in the very profession of carpentry, Joseph would have been very comfortable with silence. His work demands spending time alone with his patience and concentration as he worked on the wood. "While the wordless records of Joseph may give the impression of his insignificance, Joseph is a preacher and teacher in his own right. Joseph teaches us through what is written of his actions and decisions of faith and prudent discernment" (Dominicans Interactive, 2014). His actions speak louder than any word he could talk and they reveal the essential dispositions of a true seeker. As an ordinary carpenter and a devout Jew, Joseph adopted a discernment process in the initial level by his adherence to the scriptures, traditions, customs, and laws of the religion and State, along with his moral conscience.

The Gospel introduces Joseph as the one betrothed to Mary. (Mathew 1: 18). Joseph had made the proper discernment of a life partner. The Book of proverbs portrays the characteristics of a good wife. Some of them are trustworthiness, goodness, hard work, concern for the poor and the needy, courage, strength, dignity, wisdom, and kindness (Proverb: 31: 10-31). Joseph could discern all these qualities in Mary and chose her as his wife. Being a good Jew, he was very much law-abiding, and he could make the discernment based on scriptures. He had dreamt of a happy life with Mary in the home at Nazareth. But

from St. Joseph's vocational story, we learn that his initial plans were not what God had in mind. God had a surprise offer for him as our God is a God of surprises.

God's surprise was not a comfortable experience for Joseph, but a sword piercing the soul experience to know that Mary was pregnant. To his great sorrow, it appeared as if his future wife has done a grievous wrong and the Law demands that such a woman shall be punished. There Joseph reveals his true sense of discernment of justice and respect to the other person. The only solution this just man could think of was to divorce her quietly, and because he loved her, to do what he could to spare her public shame (Mathew 1:19). Justice is rendering to each one his due. The just man is the person who does what he should. He does what he should as an individual, as a member of society, and as a child of God (Jarvis, 2015). The saying of Jesus has come out of the life of his foster father Joseph: "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Mark 12:17). As a responsible citizen, to be registered in his family's town of origin in the census of Emperor Caesar, Augustus Joseph had to take a very long and arduous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. There Jesus was born (cf. Lk 2:7), and thus like every child, the birth of Jesus was recorded in the registry of the Empire. He observed all the prescriptions of the Law of the religion: the rites of the circumcision of Jesus, the purification of Mary after childbirth, the offering of the firstborn to God (cf. 2:21-24) (Francis, 2020, *Patris Corde*). Joseph respectfully obeys all laws and adheres to all customs and practices of tradition as he realizes that all authority is from God.

Joseph does not stop there; he graduates from the compliance mode of religious laws and moves to personal discernment. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI portrays Joseph as a just man based on Psalm 1. Joseph has his roots in the living waters of God's word and he had spent his life in uninterrupted dialogue and conversation with God (Dominicans Interactive, 2014). The culture and practice of meditating on God, in the day and night (Psalm 1), for many years, have made Joseph sensitive in his heart to the divine and precisely discern God's will (Dominicans Interactive, 2014). In fact, the Book of Ezekiel treats justice as a kind of summary of all the virtues (Ezek 18:5ff). God finds in Joseph, the person whom God can entrust his household to unfold the mysteries of human salvation. St. Joseph, therefore, is a model of one who makes the right discernment and who is openly attuned to hearing God's voice

affording the soul to make the kind of prudent judgments that God delights in (Dominicans Interactive, 2014).

Dreams, Discernment, and Obedience

St. Ignatius Loyola developed a way of decision making/discernment from his own experiences while recuperating after a cannon ball injury and daydreaming about his future and noticed interior facts. These facts which enlivened his heart and gave energy toward a certain path, he called consolation which he came to understand usually came from the Spirit of God touching into one's heart and thoughts (Leonhardt, nd). In the Scriptures and ancient traditions, dreams were considered a way for God to make his will known. The Bible demonstrates dreams as a powerful sign of the presence of God and there are 130 references to dreams in the Bible. Out of the 21 dreams recorded in the Bible, only six are in the New Testament. Dreams are an essential way that God communicates with humanity and it can be an ongoing conversation with God. (John Pellow, 2010). God speaks through dreams as we find in the Book of Joel, "...your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28). (Pope Francis, *Patris Corde*, 2020) Joseph of the Old Testament could interpret the dreams of his fellow prisoners, and it came true (Genesis 40:1-23). Later Joseph was called to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh on seven-yearlong famine, after seven years of plenty. (Genesis 41:25-36). The discernment of Joseph in interpreting the dreams saved the country and its people. As Joseph of the Old Testament took care of the granaries of Egypt and saved the people, Joseph of the New Testament nourished humanity with the bread of life (John 6:35) and nurtured the savior of the world.

Out of the six dreams in the New Testament, four were of St. Joseph. (cf. Mt 1:20; 2:13.19.22). The other two were of the wise men (Mt.2:12), and the wife of Pilate (Mathew 27:19). In the New Testament, St. Joseph continues the legacy of his namesake in the Old Testament to make the right discernment. Joseph is a lowly carpenter, not a rabbi, not a Pharisee, not of any exalted status, yet he is the one who is entrusted with the safety of the Son of God. And God revealed his message of saving plan to Joseph through dreams (Hamlin, 2020). "*Ite ad Ioseph et quidquid vobis dixerit facite,*" that is, "Go to Joseph and do all that he shall say to you" (Gen 41:55). Like Joseph in the Old Testament, Joseph of the New Testament becomes an icon of discernment. That is why for the grace of discernment Church presents to the people the example of St. Joseph and tells, "*Ite ad Ioseph!* Go to Joseph!" (Calloway, 2018).

Joseph's dreams come to him at difficult times, when he is afraid and needs to make critical decisions. The first dream comes after he finds out about Mary's mysterious pregnancy. He has heard through the rumor mill that Mary is with child—clearly not his—and so he is going to quietly call off the marriage. He did not want to “expose her to public disgrace” so he decided to “dismiss her quietly” (Mt 1:19). In the first dream, an angel helps him resolve his grave dilemma: “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:20-21). The dream allows Joseph, the righteous man who knew the law, to interpret the law with love (Vass, 2021). This scripture passage is called “St. Joseph's Annunciation” – it is the moment when Joseph received his unique vocation to be the husband of Mary, the Mother of God, and the earthly guardian of Jesus. Joseph's response was immediate: “When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” (Mt 1:24). He embraced his unique vocation and obedience and submission to God's will made it possible for him to surmount his difficulties and spare Mary (Francis, 2020, *Patris Corde*).

Joseph gradually moves from a spirituality of formal discernment based on Law and Tradition to a personal discernment of the plan of God. Despite the possible challenges and humiliations, Joseph obeys the promptings and the voice of the Spirit who has spoken to him in a dream. It has a gradual progression: initially from a human response to compassion to the love for Mary and finally a theological response, considering the love he has for God (Spirituality News, 9 March 2019). “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is. 55:8–9). “Joseph, the man of dreams, reminds us that prayer and discernment are not about what we do, so much as how we keep our hearts open to the gifts of God. We must wait for what comes, inwardly attentive, always ready to live the messages of Love” (Vass, 2021). Joseph's dream is indeed a meditation and an instrument of revelation. Joseph, the man of dreams communicates the power of trust, the power of prayer, and the power of discerning God's presence in our lives.

In the second dream, the angel tells Joseph: “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him” (Mt 2:13). In the third dream, again, Joseph is told “to get up, take the child and his mother

and go to Israel, for those seeking the child's life are dead" (Mt 2:19-20). In the fourth dream, he is warned that Herod's son has replaced him and so "to go to Galilee" (Mt 2:22-23). In the first dream, Joseph is told "to name the child Jesus because he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). In dreams, Joseph receives clear instructions in each case and he takes those messages as right discernment and acts on them with a sense of urgency. Joseph is not worried, has no question or seeking other's opinions, but he simply acts. His trust in God made him accept what came to him in the dream, without any question. Think how steadfast his trust in God must have been to know that what came to him in a dream was not to be questioned (Vass, 2021).

In every situation, Joseph declared his own "fiat", like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Francis, 2020, *Patris Corde*). When St. Joseph awoke and did as the Lord commanded, he truly had no idea what his unique vocation would demand of him. "Discernment can be like driving an automobile at night: the headlights cast only enough light for us to see the next small bit of road immediately in front of us" (Farnham, Gill, McLean, & Ward, *Listening Hearts*, p. 27). Joseph had no idea of journeying from Nazareth to Bethlehem, walking alongside his pregnant wife. There were questions about getting a room in the inn and giving birth to the baby in the stable. In every step and direction, he had to face unforeseen challenges, but his discernment and obedience enabled him to face them with courage and virtue (Lori, February 27, 2021). Discernment is a life of listening to a deeper sound and marching to a different beat, a life in which we become "all ears". (Nouwen, 2013) Discernment demands flexibility, to change our plans and programs to suit God's dream. "God does not work according to any timetable that we may set. Rather, God reveals to us what we are ready to hear when we are prepared to hear it. If we stay open and attentive to the divine presence, God will show us the way ahead, step-by-step, as we seek to move forward on our true path, one day at a time" (Farnham, 2018).

To educate to discernment means, in fact, to flee from the temptation to seek refuge behind a rigid norm or behind the image of an idealized freedom; to educate to discernment means to expose oneself, to go out of the world of one's convictions and prejudices to open oneself to understand how God is speaking to us, today, in this world, in this time, in this moment, and how He speaks to me, now (Francis, 2017).

St. Joseph submitted himself to the will of God and becomes an icon of total obedience without any kind of reservation and Jesus learned the virtue of obedience from St. Joseph. Obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). From Abraham to Jesus, all who made the right discernment were exemplary figures in obedience, and Joseph and Mary become role models for Jesus. During the hidden years in Nazareth, Jesus learned at the school of Joseph to do the will of the Father. Even at the most difficult moment of his life, in Gethsemane, Jesus made the discernment to do the Father's will rather than his own, becoming "obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). Jesus "learned obedience through his suffering. (Hebrews 5:8) (Francis, 2020, *Patris Corde*). St. Joseph trusted in the Lord and sincerely sought God's will in every step of the way and wanted to conform his life as God wanted. St. Joseph teaches us that without the traits of deep faith and prayer, we will fail in discerning what the Lord is asking. The Lord may communicate with us at unexpected times and in unexpected ways; if we are open and sensitive to the Lord in prayer, we will be able to listen to His voice that speaks to our hearts (Lori, February 27, 2021).

Discernment and Mission:

For St. Joseph, dreams were the intervention of God to reveal his unique mission and to take immediate action with immediate effect at different times. "He was called by God to serve the person and mission of Jesus directly through the exercise of his fatherhood" and that in this way, "he cooperated in the fullness of time in the great mystery of salvation and is truly a minister of salvation" (Francis, 2020, *Patris Corde*). Joseph was entrusted with the unique to take Mary into his home and be a faithful husband to her and a father to her child. Again, Joseph was also given an invitation to participate in the great mystery of God. St Joseph teaches to be inwardly watchful, learn to be sensitive to the ways of God, and be open to God's message (WCU, 2021).

Dreams for Joseph were high-risk calls from God to change his plans and follow the designs of God. It was not at all easy to accept them. But he put so much trust in a dream in the night and let himself be guided by his dreams without hesitation because his heart was directed to God. Since his heart was already inclined towards him and a small indication was enough for his watchful "inner ear" to recognize God's voice (Francis, 2021). As a great dreamer, St. Joseph teaches us that God's dreams are meant to put us in touch with reality rather than helping us to escape it. Joseph did not hesitate to obey, regardless of the

hardship involved and he responded very positively, with a readiness to walk an extra mile. In each case of the dreams, Joseph faced the reality at hand, be it taking Mary into his home, uprooting his family to go to Egypt, or returning to Israel by one way or another. He was attentive to God's message, realizing that these dreams were bigger than just him. Thus, Joseph shows us that our dreams are meant to serve the world, not just ourselves. By our obedience, we engage the realities of the moment and with God, we can act in ways that serve the greater good and God's greater glory (Gibson, 2021).

Lessons from Joseph's Discernment

- i) Difficulties and crises are signs of human life and growth and they may be God's ways of making transformation possible in our lives. St. Joseph teaches trusted in the Lord patiently and silently and remained open to God's working in his life. For true discernment, a person shall surrender all his cares to the Lord and have the disposition to listen to God's voice or dreams and understand what is being asked for. Just as Paul reminded the Romans to be transformed by the renewing of the mind to discern the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom 12:2) – Joseph reminds us to allow our minds to be renewed through our dreams (Vass, 2021).
- ii) God's way of revelation is unique and different. He does not overwhelm us with dazzling visions but quietly speaks in the depths of our hearts, drawing near to us and speaking to us through our thoughts and feelings (Francis, 2021). He may not spectacularly reveal himself, burning bush or other surprises, but in ordinary ways of human life. Hence each person has to be ever sensitive to God's dreams and plans in his daily life as God conveys his plans with gentleness through his messengers.
- iii) “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Joseph's dreams led him into experiences he would never have imagined. The first dream elevated his betrothal, but made him the father of the Messiah; the second one troubled him to run away to Egypt but saved the life of his family. The third and fourth dreams made him change his plans but brought him to Nazareth, to Nazareth, the place where Jesus would begin his preaching of the Kingdom of God. Amid all

these disruptions, Joseph found the courage to follow God’s will. In every call and mission, there are risks and they will elevate us for God’s mission, with greater trust in His providence. St. Joseph teaches that there is no vocation without risk, but the risk is for the greater good.

- iv) St. Joseph is an icon of accepting God’s plans with a perfect yes, by abandoning his plans, programs, and comforts. “And every “yes” bears fruit because it becomes part of a larger design, of which we glimpse only details, but which the divine Artist knows and carries out, making of every life a masterpiece. Joseph was “certainly not passively resigned, but courageously and firmly proactive” (*Patris Corde*, 4). St. Joseph teaches us to set priority on God’s agenda and plans, sacrificing one’s own to encounter the Lord who always surprises and never disappoints (Francis, 2021).
- v) The very fact that we encounter four of Joseph’s dreams reminds us that discernment works in all aspects and times of human lives. Discernment is the gift of the Holy Spirit and it is honed with experience. That is why the Desert Fathers and Mothers prayed for the gift of discernment in all things. According to them, discernment in every aspect of life requires flexibility, constant self-examination, and spiritual awareness (Farag, 2012). St. Joseph’s readiness to listen to and respond to God’s voice any time anywhere is the lesson for discernment.
- vi) St. Joseph received God’s word through a messenger. We need to encounter God’s messengers for the right discernment. Nobody is a judge in one’s case. Hence the guidance of ministers in the Church, spiritual directors, teachers, family members, and lay faithful will enable discernment. Hence God reveals his will through human agents, superiors, spiritual directors. Hence the guidance of the superiors, spiritual directors, and confessors is very important for the right discernment. Hence every seeker requires a Guru or spiritual guide.
- vii) As St. Joseph had always fine-tuned himself to this revealing God through others, he could listen to the promptings of the Spirit. Some of the spiritual practices for discernment are solitude and silence, prayer, scripture reading, worship, listening, and reflecting. No set program will lead us through discernment to a

- definitive answer. These discernment practices, though they are unique, complement one another and often blend together in use. These practices ensure not only the right process of discernment but also the right ways of living and growing spiritually (Miller, 2020).
- viii) St. Joseph was ready to receive the message and respond to it creatively with a sense of urgency, with utmost readiness to walk the extra mile. Just as Joseph's actions were constantly guided by the angel's instructions, we too need to adapt our spiritual practices to work, family, and community demands, always alert to the need for change (Vass, 1 April 2021).
- ix) Discernment calls for silence, humility, readiness to surrender one's interests to God's plan. A humble and silent Joseph brought up and trained Jesus to be in solitude to seek the Will of the One who sent him. St. Joseph discerned God's mission about him and provided all he could for the complete growth of Jesus as a person. It is well evident in the way Jesus grew in stature and wisdom and favor with men and God (Luke 2:52). The silent teacher could teach the Son to be eloquent about the Father and to do Father's mission. A silent husband could become an ideal partner of Mary. St. Joseph teaches all formators that creative silence, inspiring presence, and mission-filled action become more powerful than the eloquence and power of the formator.

Conclusion

Discernment is a much-needed trait in our times, especially in today's fast-paced and secularized world. According to Pope Francis, if there is no wisdom of discernment, we are likely to be carried away by the passing worldly trend. The question we need to ask is whether we are running after novelty or we resist change. "We need to examine what is within us — our desires, anxieties, fears and questions — and what takes place all around us — the signs of the times — and thus to recognize the paths that lead to complete freedom" (Reese, 2018).

In these challenging times of life, we need the gift of discernment to make sure whether something comes from the Holy Spirit or the spirit of the world or evil. We must constantly pray for this gift and develop it through prayer, reflection, reading, and good counsel. The accompaniment of wise spiritual directors will facilitate this process of discernment as an angel in the case of St. Joseph, Eli in the case of

Samuel, and Ananias in the case of St. Paul. Openness to the Spiritual director will strengthen our discernment process to distinguish the chaff from the grain. It is indeed a challenge to discern from all voices we hear, which is the Lord's voice. Hence every person shall grow in his ability to read within with his or her life and to understand where and what he or she is being called by the Lord in order to carry on his mission. That is why Pope Francis insists upon more formation in spiritual discernment (Rome Report in English, 2018).

St. Joseph was very flexible and able to act positively under new and unknown circumstances. He teaches that we should be willing to move from our comfort zone. St. Joseph followed the instructions received in the dream from the angel and there he could find the whisperings of the inspiring spirit of God. The formation community, including both the formators and formees, should be open to the spirit and shall come out of their rigid mindsets to make the right discernment. In discernment, there is a need for an attitude of "let go and let God" so that we will encounter the Lord of surprises and his saving plan for us and the people who are around us.

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