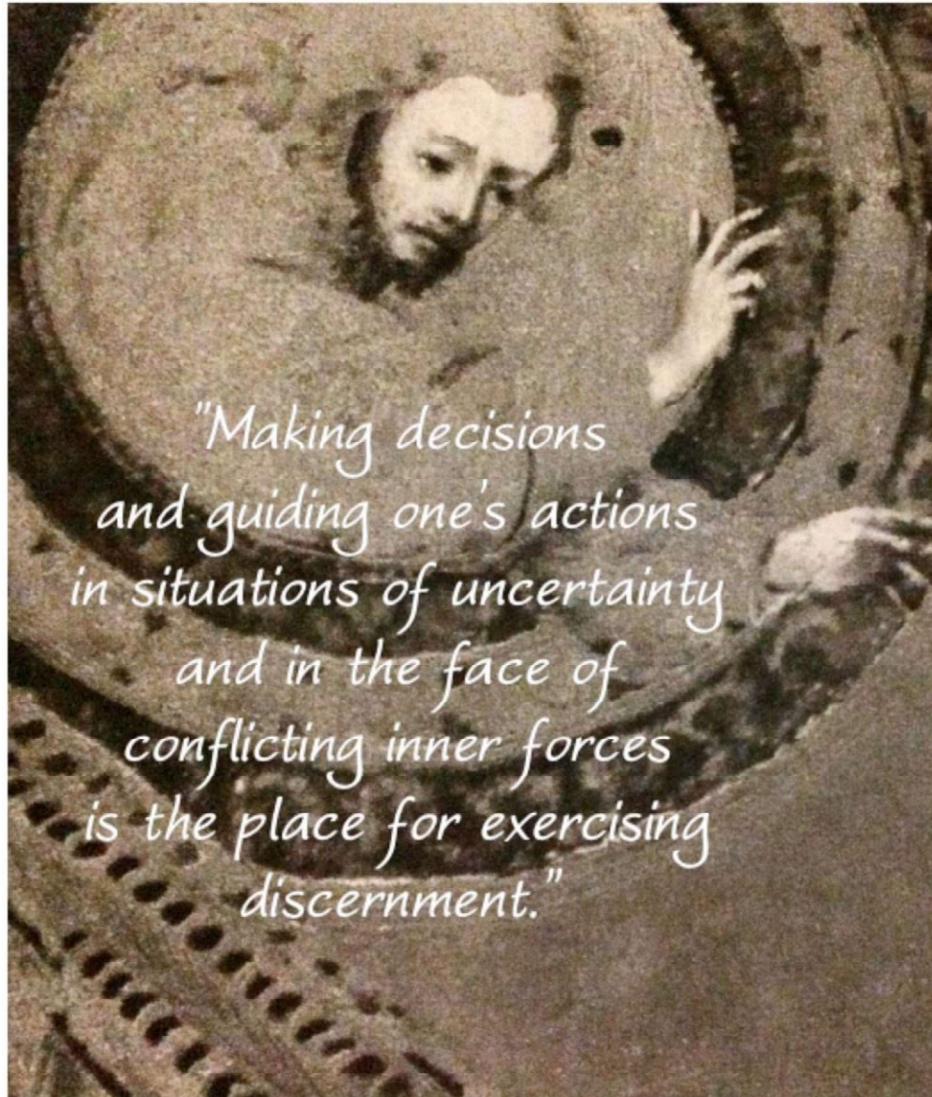


-Week 15-

Choices: Making Decisions Midst a Variety of Options



*"Making decisions
and guiding one's actions
in situations of uncertainty
and in the face of
conflicting inner forces
is the place for exercising
discernment."*

**The Synod of Bishops'
"Young People, the Faith & Vocational Discernment"
Preparatory Document**

#SERVEANDDISCERN

~Week 15~

Choices: Making Decisions Midst a Variety of Options

Last week, we explored “The Gift of Discernment: A Path Towards Fullness of Life,” which invited us to reflect on the gift of new life extended to us through Jesus’ resurrection. We were also invited to recall how Jesus reveals hints and glimpses of this new life to the disciples. Continuing into this fifteenth week of our Benedictine Volunteers 20-weeks Vocational Discernment Series inspired by the Synod of Bishops’ “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment” Preparatory Document, we explore “Choices: Making Decisions Midst a Variety of Options.” How does one go about discerning and making good decisions where there are so many options to choose from? What does Jesus say about how God views our decision making?

One of the beautiful intricacies of our modern landscape is how information and ideas is constantly being exchanged and transformed. With the emergence of technologies that allow our lives to be more informed, more varied, and more mobile—and perhaps also busier, faster, and more cluttered than ever before—we face new opportunities and challenges. We have the opportunity to engage with others cross-platform and garner different perspectives about the world. We also face the challenge of sorting through all this information, making sense of it, selecting the information that is helpful to us, and ultimately coming to some sort of decision about the information we have. How does one effectively and intentionally sort through all of these to make discerned decisions? The parable of the prodigal son offers us wonderful insight into how God walks with us as we make decisions midst a variety of options.

In Luke 15:11-32, we see three different journeys of discernment. The first journey is that of a lost son who leaves home, squanders all his resources, and returns home apologetically to his father. In the lost son, we can see how some decisions are externally challenged by the attractions and distractions of life around us. The second journey is that of an older son who has chosen to stay by his father’s side all his life and who resents his younger brother for returning home. In the older son, we can see how some decisions are internally challenged by our personal expectations and judgements. The third journey is that of a father who loves both his sons even though the pathways they each have chosen have been different. In the father, we can see how God looks down up the difficult decisions we have to make with love, gentleness, and compassion.

The father allows both his son to make their own decisions. The father does not reprimand or accuse his lost son for having made poor decisions. Rather, he welcomes his lost son home with open arms, joy, and gratitude. The father does not rebuke or silence his older son for having conflicting feelings. Rather, he listens to his older son and responds gently to him. Both sons are given choice, just as we are given free will by God. Perhaps in

our own lives, there have been times we chose to act as the lost son and other times we chose to act as the older son. God does not force or coerce us into making 'right' or 'wrong' decisions. Life presents different options and God simply desires that we make decisions out of love, like the father who chooses a loving response to each of his sons. It is love that enables the father to welcome his lost son home and comfort his misunderstanding older son. Both are loved equally and understood for the differing decisions they have made.

Places of unknowing, uncertainty, and perhaps even chaos, are opportunities to exercise discernment. Like the son who leaves home, there are times the external movements of life jerk us around, causing restlessness. Like the older son who stays at home, there are times the internal movements of our thinking and feeling can overwhelm us, causing confusion. Making a discerned choice doesn't mean that we know for anything for certain. Discerned choices means we trust God to move with us lovingly as we come to know His love for us more clearly.

Questions for Reflection:

- Spend some time prayerfully with Luke 15:11-32. First, image yourself as the lost son. What is this experience like for you? Next, image yourself as the older son. What is this experience like for you? When in your life did you make choices similar to the lost son or older son?
- Recall a time in your life saying 'yes' to something led you to say 'no' to other things. What was that experience like for you? What enabled you to say 'yes'? What did that 'yes' lead to?
- When you look at your current life situation/circumstances, what options do you see presented before you? What information do you have about these options? What emotions do these stir up in you?