

A painting of a woman with dark hair, wearing a yellow and green striped dress. She is looking thoughtfully to the side, with her hands clasped in front of her. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting her face and the texture of her dress. The background is dark and indistinct.

Rejoicing in Our Call
through Discernment

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A gift we must implore

Seeing

The influential nineteenth century German Philosopher (and high-profile atheist) Frederick Nietzsche once quipped that he would be more likely to believe in Christ as Redeemer if Christ's followers "looked a little more redeemed!" Ouch!

Christians, like all other people, will face difficulties and hardships in life and will naturally feel dejected and downhearted from time to time. It's a part of our human condition. However, our Christian heritage should of course inspire hope – the kind of hope that can not only help us to cope in difficult times, but that can lead to feelings of awe and exultation, and most of all joy. Pope Francis has addressed this issue regularly and one only has to look at the names of some of his encyclicals and exhortations:

The **Joy** of the Gospel (2013)

The **Joy** of Love (2016)

Rejoice and Exult (2018)

Br Mark O'Connor fms has even commented that Francis has a particular frustration with those he refers to as "sourpusses" – people who do not seem to experience the joy of being a Christian. In his Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete Et Exsultate – Rejoice and Exult – Pope Francis begins this way:

GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE

REJOICE AND EXULT



APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
ON THE CALL TO HOLINESS
IN TODAY'S WORLD

POPE FRANCIS

“Rejoice and be glad” (Mt5:12), Jesus tells those persecuted and humiliated for his sake. The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not settle for a bland and mediocre existence.’ (#1)

Share with a partner (5 min)

What is it about the Christian message that brings you a sense of hope and joy?

Listening

So how do we tap into this “happiness for which we were created.”?

Pope Francis suggests the answer to this question can be found by us “imploring a wonderful gift – the gift of **discernment**.” A gift he says, “which calls for more than intelligence and common sense.” (#166) So, what is it?

Discernment, in the spiritual sense, refers to my willingness to **allow the Spirit of God to guide and assist me** in weighing up choices and making decisions. It is a process that involves prayerful reflection as well as rational thinking. In other words, discernment happens at the point where head and heart come together.

Defining Discernment:

The process for making choices in which we honestly attend to:

- The rational reasons – pro’s and con’s –
- The realm of our feelings, emotions and desires – “movements of the soul.”



Every day we are faced with choices. Some are small and relatively insignificant – coffee or tea for breakfast? Some can be big with significant potential impacts on ourselves and others – will I apply for another job? Making as many good choices as possible, particularly with big decisions, can lead to greater happiness and fulfilment.

The rational reasons involve data gathering and being informed which is very important. However, it is in the realms of our feelings, emotions, and desires that we are most likely to encounter the spirit of God. In entering into this space, and prayerfully reflecting on our experiences, we can become more open and receptive to God’s presence in our lives.

Not all decisions need to be discerned

Should I get the car serviced?

When can I get the shopping done?

Do we let the tuck-shop sell sushi?

Do we develop a policy on Immersions?

Some decisions do need discernment

Which school will I send my child to?

Shall we move away from our aging parents?

What is the most appropriate consequence for that student?

What is my next career move?

Personal Reflection (5 min)

Recall a decision that you had to make personally. Can you identify elements of discernment that were involved?

Responding

For us to be able to discern what God asks of us, it is important that we have some familiarity with God. We should know God personally—not just know about God. And the best way to grow in familiarity with God is through Prayer.

The Examen

One type of prayer which can be helpful in reflecting on where we might find God at work in our lives is the Examen. This prayer is a way of reviewing our lives in a reflective way, sifting through our experiences and interactions in a way that allows the presence of God in my life to emerge. It has several variations, but the core elements are as follows:

I give thanks:

I begin by giving thanks for the graces, benefits and good things of my day.

I ask for help:

I ask the Holy Spirit to help me to discern my day with openness and honesty – remember, this is just between me and God

I review:

I review my day, hour by hour, to see how God is working in my life, paying particular attention to my feelings and emotions at times that seemed more significant.

I respond:

I respond to what I felt or learned in my review just made. This might include further gratitude or asking for forgiveness and guidance for the times I feel I haven't been at my best.

I resolve:

I resolve with hope and the grace of God to take my learnings into a new day.



“The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Socrates

Let us pray together

Take a couple of minutes to pause, take a few deep breaths and try to clear your mind.

Let's take our time to be slowly guided through the 5 elements above. You may wish to jot down a few points to capture what has emerged for you as you conclude your Examen.

References:

<https://www.slideserve.com/roman/discernment>

Pray as you go App

Gaudete Et Exsultate – Pope Francis

Always Discerning – Joseph Tetlow SJ