

HOW TO DISCERN GOD'S WILL LIKE ST JOSEPH

II BE JUST

Introduction

The second step in discernment according to St Joseph, related of course to the first one to be silent, is to be just.

Matthew's Gospel calls St. Joseph a "righteous man" – a man who lived his life according to the Law. Towards the end of that same Gospel, Jesus is referred to as a righteous man twice. First by the wife of Pilate: *"When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him."* (27,19) Then, by Pilate himself: *"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see you to it."* (27,24)

The New Testament Greek word for just is δίκαιος *dikaios* meaning righteous, observing divine laws, upright, virtuous, keeping the commands of God. This word appears 19 times in the Gospel of Matthew (the most frequent in the NT) that was written to show the first Christian community, who were all Jews, that Jesus did not abolish the Law of Moses, absolutely not, but perfected it. Love goes beyond the law.

The corresponding Old Testament Hebrew word is צַדִּיק *sadik* meaning just, lawful, righteous. We find this word most frequent in the Book of Proverbs (66 times) and in the Book of the Psalms (52 times). Listen to these four examples and think of St Joseph, notice how perfectly describe the man.

"Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning." (Prov 9,9)

"The just man walks in his integrity: his children are blessed after him."
(Prov 20,7)

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivers him out of them all." (Ps 34,19)

"the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble." (Ps 37,39)

"Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."
(Ps 97,11)

"The LORD opens the eyes of the blind: the LORD raises them that are bowed down: the LORD loves the righteous:" (Ps 146,8)

1. The first voice you listen is your conscience

Dear sisters and brothers, is this link between being quiet to listen and being just a coincidence? I think not! It sounds obvious, but the best way to hear God's voice in your life is to attune your entire life to Him by actively living the Faith. When you live every aspect of your life the way God intends you too, it becomes easier to hear God's voice when He's ready to reveal His mission for you.

In fact, in the last teaching we said that we need to create silence if we want to listen to the subtle voice of God and come to know His Will. We said that such a silence needs to be exterior and interior. And we also hinted at the greatest challenge to arrive at a real and deep silence of the mind and the heart and the greatest fear and resistance we have to arrive at that point, which also explains why many cannot live without some exterior noise.

The reason is that the first voice we hear when we enter into this kind of deep silence is actually the voice of the conscience. The conscience is something very human, it is part of the make up of our human nature. It is the sense of good and bad, right or wrong in every human being. We cannot silence conscience. We can only suffocate it. In fact, the only way not to listen to one's own conscience is by burying it under a huge load of noise, or else by escaping every moment of quiet, of silence, of reflection. Because surely enough, the moment one is made to face one's self, then, all the things that are distorted, wrong and bad, surface to demand rectification, put right, reconciled. And until this is completely done, the conscience will not leave one in peace.

2. You cannot listen to the voice of God if you are not just

In the introduction to *Patris Corde*, Pope Francis says something very obvious and fundamental. He says: "*We know that Joseph was a lowly carpenter (cf. Mt 13:55), betrothed to Mary (cf. Mt 1:18; Lk 1:27). He was a "just man" (Mt 1:19), ever ready to carry out God's will as revealed to him in the Law (cf. Lk 2:22,27,39).*" (Introduction) What He is saying is very logical. St Joseph sought the Will of God and had the disposition to carry it out the moment he came to know it, because first of all he saw the Will of God in the Law and he obeyed the Law, he lived by the Commandments revealed by God to Moses.

If you think about it, should be obvious to everybody. How can you truly say, that you are seeking to know what God wants of you, in whatever situation, conflict or choice you are faced it, if you are not listening to what God has been telling you black on white since ages?! How can you ever say that you are always disposed to fulfil God-s Will, once He reveals it to you, when you are breaking His known and basic Will expressed in the Law, or the Commandments?!

Therefore, the second step of discernment is as essential as the first one. If this step does not precede the first one, it essentially follows; of course, for those who sincerely are seeking the Will of God. Being just does not mean that you never fall, you never break the Law, you never sin. Experiencing the Mercy of God, even through the Sacrament of Reconciliation is also a way of becoming just. In fact, when the Gospel tells us that St Joseph was a just man, it is referring to a divine justice, to a justice that goes beyond human justice, as we shall soon see.

However, we need to say something about scruples, which too is a false idea of justice. Scruples, or the seeing of sin everywhere and in everything, which is related to perfectionism, is rather a sickness and a sort of slavery from which one needs to be healed and freed. A scrupulous person can never be able to do the discernment that St Joseph has done. Sure, because St Joseph's discernment demands such a freedom even from the Law!

3. God's Will always demands something more than just being just

God's Will always demand something more than just being just! St Joseph was just, he observed the law, but he was seeking the Will of God in a situation where he knew exactly what God's Will was according to the Law. Yet, he knew that God can ask, and very often do ask something more!

The experts of the Law could not understand the attitude, the behaviour, the teachings and the choices of Jesus. Their principal and constant accusation was that He was breaking the Law. Yet, Jesus was very clear in His declaration: *"Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, is to disappear from the Law until all its purpose is achieved."* (Mt 5,17-18) Jesus's rule was Love and Mercy. St Paul says that *"the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself.""* (Gal 5,14)

Therefore, St Joseph sought something more, something that goes beyond the law. This is the teaching of St Paul in the whole letter to the Galatians. Read it. Read it to understand why St Joseph was able to be convinced that what he dreamt was really coming from the Spirit of God. St Joseph was just, but he was not justified by the law, but by the Spirit of God and by his grace. *"You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."* (Gal 5,4)

Being just does not necessarily guarantee that you make spiritual, creative and generous decisions. But to make spiritual, creative and generous choices, like the one taken by St Joseph, to wake up and he neither accuses Mary, nor send her away quietly, but embrace her pregnant as She was, taking Her as his wife and dedicate his life for Her Child, you need to be just.