

HOW TO DISCERN GOD'S WILL LIKE ST JOSEPH

IV ACT AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

Dear sisters and brothers, this is our last teaching in the School of St Joseph. It is not a coincidence that we are concluding this series of teachings inspired by the reflections given to us by Pope Francis in *Patris Corde* for the Year of St Joseph that came to an end last week, with the last step in discernment according to the Patron Saint of the Universal Church.

All the teachings we have been listening, reflecting and meditating during the last nine months, would go down the drain, if they would not have enlightened us and gave us the courage and strength to take even one little action to improve our spiritual life and our mission of evangelisation and accompaniment of the brethren God has entrusted to us in our cell. It would really be a pity, if all the effort that around twenty Promoters and Referents from different countries and continents, would leave us where we have been a year ago.

All the four steps of discernment, about which we have spoken in the previous three teachings about discernment according to St Joseph, would mean nothing, even a waste of time, if they do not lead to this one last step: to act.

The scope of the teaching during the Cell meeting, and our purpose in putting on this School of St Joseph, is not just to feed our mind, to be more informed, more intelligent, even in spiritual and religious matters. Everything we do, in the cell meeting and outside, is to evangelise, to facilitate that personal encounter with Jesus Christ. In this we are convinced: that no one in the Gospels, with the exception of the Pharisees that were hardened of heart, has ever met Jesus personally and remained the same as he or she was before. Everyone of them took some sort of action, some had even changed course completely, but some action they did take, small or radical.

We said it already, it is never useless to repeat it: the whole purpose of entering into a process of discernment is to discover the Will of God. We assume that this is not a question of curiosity, one seeks to know the Will of God because one is disposed to obey and do what He reveals. *"Moses went and told the people all Yahweh's words and all the laws, and all the people answered with one voice, 'All the words Yahweh has spoken we will carry out!'"* (Ex 24,3)

That is why St Joseph starts by teaching us to be silent. That is why St Joseph encourages us not just to seek to be just for the sake of discernment, but to lead a just life, a life according to God's commandments. And that is why he gives us a striking example of someone who does not use God irresponsibly, but takes on his own responsibility of seeking solutions, of thinking about alternatives, of planning what to do. However, St Joseph shows us that we need to be flexible, because you never know the surprises of the creativity of the Holy Spirit.

However, now we need to reflect on the fifth and last step in the process of discernment, namely to act.

1. Time to decide

St. Joseph was a man of action. Once God revealed His plan, St. Joseph acted on it immediately. Since God revealed His Will to Joseph in his sleep, twice St Luke tells us that, once he received instruction what he needed to do, he “*woke up*”, “*got up and... left that night.*” He did not even wait until dawn, or until he took his well deserved rest and sleep, being such a hard working man. No! Once the Will of God was clear to him, he moved immediately into action.

It is important to remember and underline, that God does not treat us like robots, or worse like chessmen. God respects our freedom and our free will. If we really seek His Will, He is more than willing to reveal it to us, because it is always for our own good. But then, His role ends there. Once His Will is revealed, He waits, because then it is up to us to decide what to do.

Maybe the difference between those who reach great heights of sanctity and those who remain mediocre christians, is that they were able to take decision to act without procrastinations. Of course, one can make mistakes, but the greater mistake is never to decide!

If there is something that must have struck us during this year of reflection on this great and humble man, is the influence he must have had on Jesus in His upbringing and formation. Jesus too was a man Who knew what to do and when to decide and act. When Jesus knew His time had come, He deliberately set off for Jerusalem to fulfil God’s plan for Him. If He was trained to decide and act at the right moment, especially when asked to heal, preach, move from one place to another, how would He ever come to decide and act with determination when in front of Him laid the way of the Cross?!

The Pope has some beautiful and very relevant thoughts with regard to this subject. He writes:

“The nobility of Joseph’s heart is such that what he learned from the law he made dependent on charity. Today, in our world where psychological, verbal and physical violence towards women is so evident, Joseph appears as the figure of a respectful and sensitive man. Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, he makes a decision to protect Mary’s good name, her dignity and her life. In his hesitation about how best to act, God helped him by enlightening his judgment” (PC 4)

And in article 7 He continues, as if having us pastors and leaders of cells in mind:

“In a similar way, Joseph acted as a father for his whole life. Fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person.” (PC 7)

2. Now is the time to act

When the Will of God is clear to you, having followed all the four steps we mentioned during these teachings, remember that Joseph is there to help you at this critical moment that might be the most difficult. Until it was time for Jesus to go out and fulfil His mission, Joseph never left Him. There is no doubt that Joseph had already been dead by the time Jesus was 30. Some say that probably, Jesus waited until his death to go out and plunge into the public ministry. Whatever, the point is that Joseph never left Jesus unaccompanied, how much more is he not going to leave us alone, we who need him so much more than Jesus!

Although the tradition of the devotion to St Joseph is relatively new in the Catholic Church and not so much developed, yet there is one appeal that is so attached to him: *"Ite ad Joseph"*, go to Joseph. The Pope makes reference to this council and gives us its explanation:

*"Popular trust in Saint Joseph is seen in the expression **"Go to Joseph"**, which evokes the famine in Egypt, when the Egyptians begged Pharaoh for bread. He in turn replied: "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do" (Gen 41:55). Pharaoh was referring to Joseph the son of Jacob, who was sold into slavery because of the jealousy of his brothers (cf. Gen 37:11-28) and who – according to the biblical account – subsequently became viceroy of Egypt (cf. Gen 41:41-44)."* (PC 1)

If we need to go continuously to St Joseph, especially in our times when we have lost the father, when many are suffering because of the absence of a fatherly figure in their lives, and when men have given up the responsibility of being fathers, how much more should we go to St Joseph now that it is the time to wake up, to decide and act!

When we finish this teaching, do not go to do anything, do not go anywhere, do not go to nobody.... But remain in your place, stay there some more few minutes and *Ite ad Joseph*, go to St Joseph and after thanking him for this beautiful School we attended together, ask him to give you strength to take at least one small decision that the Holy Spirit has been enlightening you and to help you act on it without waste of time.

Now the time of listening is finished. Now is the time to act.

Now the time of hearing about St Joseph is exhausted. Now is the time for you to act.

Conclusion: Verification and confirmation follows

Act. Do not be afraid. You might make a mistake. But if you wait until you are 100% sure, I assure you that you will never be and you will die with great remorse that one day, on the 17th December 2021, you had the opportunity to do something and you did not. The thing is that you will never know whether what you think God is calling you to do, even if it seems really insignificant, would eventually change the course of history!

Do you think, St Joseph imagined all the consequences of what he had done that day that he woke up and instead of sanding Mary quietly, he took her as his wife

together with her Child?! Had anybody assured St Joseph that, without any little doubt, what he dreamt was really coming from God. He believed! This is it. Whatever God asks from us, all the fruit of discernment, we need to receive it by faith. God never gives any material, physical or intellectual assurance to what He asks from us. He always put our faith to the test.

Surely, a confirmation will come afterwards. If we would have mistaken, He will show us. It is not a problem for us. He understands our difficulties, but He wants to see our generosity and our willingness to take responsibility and go forth in our mission. He never judges us or condemn us. Sometimes He comes to modify our decision and action, not because we would have missed His voice or made a mistake, but because it would be the time to precise something. When Joseph decided to leave Egypt and go to Judea he was doing something right, however, later God told him not to go there but to go to Galilee and Nazaret instead.

When we do not hesitate what we think that He is asking from us, God will always confirm that we took the right decision, because we feel peace and joy, not like the ones the world give, but we experience the active presence of the Holy Spirit and His fruits. Then, God will grant us the grace to see and reap abundant fruit from the decision and action we would have taken.

I wish to thank, not only the 20 speakers we had in the School of St Joseph, for their commitment, dedication and joy with which they shared their reflections; but also the group of translators that worked so hard to have all the teachings in English, Italian, French, Spanish and some even in Portuguese available in time; the technicians, the Deacon Gaetano and Paolo, who were always present to assist us in the live transmissions on Youtube; Francesca from Rome for the beautiful design for this year and the flyers for every session and Gian Luca from Ragusa, the web administrator for putting all the teachings available on the Website, and lastely but not least, our dear secretary, Stefania who has presented these teachings. I thank also all of you who have listened, read and used and continue to use these teachings for the benefit of so many of our dear cell members. I remind you that I offer the intention of my daily Mass for each one of you. God bless you.