

SHARING THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL

St. Ignatius of Loyola & Discernment

This month's saint is Ignatius of Loyola and our focus is discernment. Discernment is seeking to know and follow God's plan for the adventure He has planned for my life, knowing that He desires my ultimate joy and happiness.

IN DEPTH

As Christians, we know and trust that God wants us to be happy, after all, Jesus came to give us His infinite joy and to do so to the fullest! (Jn 15:11). The goal of discernment, then, is to discover His plan to guide us toward this joy on the unique adventure He has in mind for us. The world sees discernment as the careful evaluation of various factors to determine the right decision to make in a given situation. A Christian understanding of discernment is different. The question of Christian discernment isn't "what's best?" But "of all of these things, what comes from God?" What God wants may not always line up with what we think is best. So often we think we know what will make us happy, but when we get it we are still left feeling empty and dissatisfied. It is hard to let go of these things we are attached to, to trust that God wants something better, and freely accept His will, but it is necessary for true joy. Just like the woman at the well, God wants to give us living water so that we will never thirst again. (cite) This is a constant invitation rather than a one time gift, and we can accept the invitation by paying attention to the movements of our heart. God is continuously communicating with us through our hearts, through others, and through the events in our lives. True discernment is hard, but will guide you toward your sanctification!

CONNECTION TO THE SAINT

St. Ignatius of Loyola was a Spanish priest and the founder of the Society of Jesus, known as the Jesuits. Ignatius began his life as a soldier, aspiring to worldly glory and status in the military. He directed his whole life toward achieving what he thought would make him happy, but it all fell apart when he was severely wounded in battle. During his lengthy recovery, he read the lives of the saints and experienced a profound conversion. God showed him an alternative adventure that Ignatius never would have imagined for himself, one that would lead him to the sainthood and joy he was made for. He renounced his former life with humility and courage, discerning God's will and at each step and seeking to do everything "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam" ("For the greater glory of God"). St. Ignatius personally understood how deeply attached to our own desires and goals we can be and how these attachments keep us from being free and becoming the saints God calls us to be. Because of this, he devoted his life to educating others about the spiritual life, especially through discernment. His Spiritual Exercises, the Examen prayer, and other works are still used today to help people learn how to pray well. His life serves as proof that, with God's grace, it is possible to grow from a life of self-seeking to a life of spiritual freedom, living according to God's purpose for us and receiving the joy He has designed for us.



WAYS STAFF CAN PRACTICE THE VIRTUE

- **A Disposition of Openness:** A disposition of discernment is a constant state of being open to God's voice. It involves attentiveness to God's presence in the ordinary, allowing Him to influence not only major choices but also our daily actions, attitudes, and relationships. This openness requires humility and a willingness to let go of our own preferences, biases, and attachments in order to remain receptive to God's gentle, sometimes unexpected promptings.
- **Create Space for Prayerful Silence:** Begin meetings or major decisions with a moment of silent prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide the team. Ignatius believed that quieting the mind allows for more open-hearted discernment. This practice also emphasizes that the work is ultimately for God's glory, not personal gain or preference.
- **Practice the Daily Examen:** Spend 5–10 minutes at the end of each day to reflect on how God was present. Go through the five steps: gratitude, review, sorrow, forgiveness, and grace. Reflecting regularly helps you notice moments of peace or unease, which can reveal how God is guiding you.
- **Discernment of Spirits:** Study Catholic teaching on consolation and desolation (signs of moving toward or away from God) and look for them in your day. For instance, when making a decision, observe your inner responses: Does the choice bring a sense of peace and purpose, or does it feel forced or driven by anxiety? Peace is not the absence of difficulty, but a deep calmness.
- **Fostering Holy Indifference:** "Holy indifference" is a readiness to embrace God's will above personal desires. It is being okay with whatever may happen. Cultivate this attitude by focusing on your mission over personal preferences. This might mean, for example, being open to changing roles or re-evaluating a project if it better serves the community. It is not ignoring what you want, but accepting and being open to the fact that God might want something better.
- **Using the Principle of "Magis":** Magis, or "the more," encourages choosing actions that lead to the greater good. Use this principle by asking, "What serves the greatest good for our mission?" This doesn't mean doing *more work* but seeking to serve in ways that have the greatest impact for God's glory.
- **Discern in Community:** Seek guidance from colleagues, spiritual mentors, or trusted friends. Talking about choices with trusted others often brings clarity and insight, particularly when decisions are complex.
- **Model and Reinforce Values of Patience and Openness:** You can model patience and an open mind by being receptive to feedback, recognizing that God can speak through any other staff member. This openness inspires others to practice patience with themselves and others as they seek God's will. Reinforce the idea that discernment is not always about achieving fast or definitive answers but rather growing closer to God through trust and humility.