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**Discernment** Parish Pentecostal Renewal **Life in the Spirit Seminar Reunion**  
Saturday, July 8, 2000 8:30 a.m. Church Hall

### **Part I**

Today I would like to talk about discernment. The term is usually “discernment of spirits.” What it really has to do with is discerning how the Lord works in our lives.

You have all indicated--those of you who have spoken--have indicated a heightened sense of God’s presence; and we want to encourage this and nurture this. But at the same time we have to be aware of the fact that the more we are aware of God’s presence and the more we are tuned into the spiritual, that, unfortunately, creates a danger that we can be misled. When people don’t really care about God, then, you know, they’re automatically misled. Then they believe that because they come to a conversion experience that they become almost infallible or that they are now going to be free from deception. In other words, well, in the past I was wrong, but now I’m right. In the past I made mistakes, but now I am right on the narrow path that leads to truth. And that’s a little bit of a dangerous point of view. If you recall, Christ once said to the disciples that the road that leads to life is narrow and winding. Now that means that there are twists and turns and narrow--the word “narrow” means that you could fall off. I mean it’s a matter of delicate--there is a delicate kind of balancing that is needed as we proceed in the Spirit, that we cannot simply take it for granted that God is always going to be, you know, hitting us on the head and directing us with a real strong shove. There are moments when we do feel that we’ve been hit in the head or, you know, really awakened. And those are wonderful experiences. Those are moments, which we can call “consolations” or special graces. But then as we walk day to day, again, we do have a heightened awareness and we are to be centered in the Spirit or in Christ, not in ourselves--true enough. That does not mean that we can just go merrily on our way. All right? We do need to be questioning whether we really understand what the Spirit’s doing.

And there are two basic problems. Now first of all, when it comes to really wondering about where ideas come from--you know, sometimes ideas just come into our heads! Okay, well, are they from the Lord? Well, maybe, maybe not--that’s the answer. How do we know? It’s very interesting. St. Ignatius of Loyola says, “We can’t really know where these ideas or feelings or impressions or insights or desires or intuitions come from.” And he said, “It’s not important to know where they’re coming from. What’s really important is to know where they’re leading to.” Where are they leading? And we can see this. We can watch ourselves, observe ourselves. Are these intuitions, feelings, movements of the Spirit, senses we have, are they helping us become more Christ-like? We know what that is to be Christ-like! Or is it really creating divisions?

And with the issue of divisions it’s a very delicate thing because Christ said that he has “come to bring the sword to divide father from son and mother from daughter.” So some divisions actually are a result of our becoming really faithful. So when we become faithful, then we’re divided from those who aren’t faithful--and that could be our own

family! And that can be very painful. On the other hand, the community of the faithful should not be

divided by anyone's experience. See the difference? If the division is from those who don't want to be faithful, that's one thing. But it is quite another thing if religious experience or our experience of the Spirit divides us from other believers! That's a danger sign.

So we need to have others involved in our discernment, three, four, five people. That is why prayer groups are very healthy, because if you go to a prayer group, you can share where you are coming from and others can listen to this and say--you know, they might say nothing--but they might say, "You know, that bothers me that you said that. That doesn't set well with me." Because we need to balance this off, to share with other people to stay on that narrow winding path. And the truth of the matter is that we do go on in tangents. Our emotions can be like a pendulum.

Now very often it's a very slow moving pendulum. Through much of our lives in regard to God and the things of God we're relatively cool, and many people are actually cold--I mean just cold! It doesn't move them at all; they don't care! Now one of the reasons why we have the image of the Sacred Heart, for example, is to speak to us of the need for warmth, that we need to become more warm in regard to God and the things of God and to become more emotional--if I may use that word--in our devotions, that we recognize the great love God has for us and that we actually feel that to some degree and let that really move us, not only mentally but also emotionally and even physically. So if you study the saints they do talk about the need for becoming more emotionally involved in faith, and also even physically involved, for example, in prayer.

In the ancient Church, in the early Church, prayer was more physical than it is for us. For example, there was a lot of praying with hands raised--like this. See? And that was just very common. And singing was, you might say, always a component. Now today you notice a lot of people don't sing much. We're trying to restore singing to liturgy, but a lot of people hold back. It's like, well, I don't sing, or I don't have a good voice, or I don't have a good ear. But that's not the point. The point is that the physical body is supposed to be involved in worship, and part of the physical body is your voice and all this, so becoming more physically involved is also part of healthy worship.

But emotionally now we can go into extremes--and physically too. So some people get into an agitation, you know, and they are always agitated; and they talk about the Lord and talk about the Lord and talk about the Lord, and everything is the Lord. And you start to wonder oh well, there's something not quite right here. And there isn't because it's like a pendulum that's gone way to another extreme. And let's face it; we all have different degrees of physical health. But we also have different degrees of emotional health, and we have different degrees of mental health. And all of this is something we have to take into consideration, which the saints do. And St. Ignatius talks about some of the problems actually coming from ourselves, our own imbalances, whether they be of an emotional nature or a mental nature. Okay?

Now one of the things that we believe in the Church is that God does communicate with us, and that is true. And that is a fundamental belief of Catholics and Pentecostals. I don't know if you know this, but Evangelical Protestants often don't like Pentecostals. They call them Crypto-Catholics," and the reason is because they believe that God continues to speak. And that is not a belief of the strict Evangelicals because God spoke--past tense, once and for all, in the Bible--and now he doesn't speak anymore. That is a strict, classical Evangelical point of view. But we don't have that point of view. We believe that God continues to direct and guide. But for all the more reason we need, again, the discernment of, as I say, three, four, five other people; and we also have to be under the authority of the Church. That's why God gave us a Church, so that we have the authority of the Holy Father, the bishops, and so on, to guide us. So if our ideas of what God is calling us to do are really contrary to what the Holy Father is speaking, or the bishops, well then there's something wrong with us. See?

Now where does that wrong idea come from? Well, it could come from ourselves. And I would mention that there are mental conditions whereby people hallucinate, especially words; they hear things--they do! And so we have to be aware of that. So just because someone might say, "Well, I heard God say," or "God told me," just because they say, "God told me," that doesn't mean you're supposed to believe them. See? You have to be discerning yourself and others, all the time! See? So if someone says, "God told me this," or "God told me that," maybe that is a discernment that is correct. Maybe God did lead them to something; maybe God did not. Maybe that's just something out of balance. So that's what I'm talking about. See? I'm talking about being wise in the Spirit, letting things be--you don't want to say to anybody, "Oh, well, you're just--you're crazy. I mean you just hear those things--that's crazy!" Maybe they're not. Maybe God is speaking to them. On the other hand, if God is speaking to them, which should resonate with the Spirit in, well, a number of people. See? Ultimately the Spirit can't contradict himself. The Spirit can't be telling one person one thing and contradicting himself in someone else. So that's why the discernment process goes on. And so where is this leading? Is it leading you into a deeper sharing with your sisters and brothers in the faith, in the Church, in Christ? Then that would be a good sign. If it leads away because when you say, "The Lord told me this," and everyone says, "Well, I don't know. I don't think so," then it's a sign, well, be careful. You might need to really be more aware of yourself in that regard.

So it can be and it does happen that people are thoroughly sincere; sincerity is no guarantee to infallibly. So I'm not saying that people are necessarily trying to deceive you or trying to deceive themselves. They may be utterly sincere but for whatever reason simply misled. Okay? So that's something we do have to talk about, that through their own weakness, through their own lack of education, through their own ignorance, through mental problems, perhaps misperceptions they have, that they might really believe sincerely that God has told them something, told them to tell you something. Well, take all this with a very large grain of salt until you can check it out! And be aware of your own reactions, because if something really disturbs you, if someone tells you something or shares something and it really upsets you, that's a sign. It shouldn't upset

you if it's from the Lord. So be aware of all these different facets. Well, that's the first thing.

## Part II

The second thing is also in the Church today--and by "Church" I use it in the widest sense--I don't just mean the Catholic Church, but among Christian people today there are movements that are actually unhealthy. All right? And they claim the Spirit as their source. Okay? Here is a book called *Counterfeit Revival*, and a man named Hank Landgraf writes it. Now Hank is not a Catholic. I can tell you right now he is of the Evangelical tradition. But this is actually a very interesting book because what he is talking about is a lot of hoaxes and a lot of deception that has really filled the Church. Now, again, I don't want to say that every single person he talks about in this book is necessarily a hoax. But I'm saying that in general he is on to something because there are people who exploit naive and sincere people.

Now the deception can be very complicated in the sense that I actually think a lot of people deceive themselves. Okay? There is a group that meets not too far from here; it's a little, tight-knit community where men and women and children live together. It's very charismatic, and there are all kinds of very bizarre things going on over there! I don't really want to tell you where it is because it's just as well you didn't know; but I happen to know some of these people, and I'm very sad for them. And some of the things going on over there are actually, blatantly immoral, which anybody should be able to tell. So believe it or not, some of these connivers and leaders I'm speaking of can actually convince people that certain things that everyone knows are immoral are okay. See? How do they do this? It's really charism that's gone astray. It's charism that's become, well, demonic. See? In a certain sense I think that was part of the rise of Hitler; it was a demonic charism. It was something that was really diabolical, but it was spiritual, powerful. See? And these things can really affect communities; and the most affected are communities that are inbred, cut off from other churches, where they have an inbred hierarchy. In other words, more or less, the pastor is the pope, is the boss, period! That's the most dangerous. And I happen to know that this pastor of this community told people--because some of these people were former Roman Catholics--and he told them how when they joined--this is many years ago back in the 70's--he said, "If you come into this community, you can no longer consider yourself a Catholic. You must be loyal only to this church." Well, that's the first sign of something terribly wrong. But unfortunately these people didn't read the sign. Some of their marriages are now in ruins and so on. But the point is discernment is necessary. There are many things going on.

Now outward phenomena--there are certain phenomena that may be good or not so good. One of them you see sometimes in our Church. It's called "resting in the Spirit," or "being slain in the Spirit." Is there anything necessarily wrong with this? Not necessarily. Could there be something wrong with this? Yes, there could be something wrong with it. Why? Because what's happening is actually people are at a very vulnerable moment. See? And I myself have rested in the Spirit; I've experienced that. And it's very pleasant. And when it happened to me the person who prayed over me was a very holy woman. And I have no problems; I'm sure it was the Holy Spirit that rested upon me. But we can't take it for granted that everybody who is praying for somebody else is necessarily one hundred percent authentic. What I'm saying is doors are being opened in the spiritual

nature, in the inner place of our souls; and sometimes-unhealthy spirits just come in, and I don't really understand the whole thing--I don't want to understand the whole thing, really! But I do know that sometimes problems arise. And something like being slain in the Spirit, if it happens to you, if you're legitimately praying and someone prays over you and you just rest in the Spirit, don't be concerned. But you need to be concerned if you or others become inordinately attracted to this sort of thing, or if that's the thing that absolutely you've just got to do this, or you see people, you know, they line up to be prayed over and if they don't fall over, well then they're not happy; and then they have to go line up somewhere else. That is an inordinate thing and it's really unhealthy. Okay?

Question on what is resting in the Spirit?

Resting in the Spirit. All right, when you see people being prayed over and then they fall over and they're kind of unconscious for a while. And I mean it can be perfectly legitimate, but I'm saying that's not something you want to run after or rush after; and there are people who go from church to church looking for that type of thing. That isn't healthy. You don't want to go look for that, you know, because actually it could even be connected to hypnotism. There is a possibility that a person actually becomes so auto suggested that they just go up and, you know, they're falling over because they want to fall over. And the point is rather that we need to be open to the Spirit, what the Spirit wants to give us, but we shouldn't be deciding what it is. Okay? And when it's set up in such a way that everyone expects that, that isn't necessarily the healthiest way to operate. What we should expect is that whatever God wants to do for us that day will be done and be happy with it. And myself, when I pray over people, I prefer to pray seated--I like them seated and I like to be seated--so that won't happen. And I've also prayed with people or in groups where someone stands behind them and holds them up. See? Because you can get a little rocky and that's a legitimate reaction to the Spirit because the body and the soul are connected. So it is legitimate. But just not to go for that like, oh I have to have that, and then I'll be happy when that happens to me. It almost becomes like a drug because when you have slaying in the Spirit, when you rest in the Spirit, I mean, there is a deep sense of peace and relaxation. It lasts for maybe two minutes, three minutes, four minutes, however many minutes--I don't know. And it is fine; and it's a gift, so take the gift and go. But then if that's the thing--well, I want to have that gift everyday; well, I always have to have that gift. Well, I'm going to go to that healing Mass only because I want that gift--that's wrong! You see, your whole movement is going away from what you really need, which is what God knows you need. See?

[Comment about St. Catherine of Siena saying that when it happens through the Holy Spirit, it really happens as if it were an accident.]

It seems to be, yeah. It just happens--uninvited. This is a type of consolation; there are many types of consolations. They are good; they are not bad. And so we want what is good, but maybe we want a lesser good rather than a greater one. So the fact that we are now trying to pursue the Spirit in our lives doesn't mean we are going to be free from that moral flaw of seeking a lesser good rather than a greater one. So we always have to be open to the greater good, whatever it is God wants for us. So that's one event.

Now there are other things, which I myself have never witnessed, and I'm not too worried about any of you getting involved in various groups that do these things; but I've heard of them. And even a friend of mine who is a monsignor and he is an older man and he used to be extremely, I'd say, straight and very conservative, you know. And he got involved in this movement that is all about laughing. They talk about holy laughter. And they go to these meetings and they start laughing and it's like completely, you know, like I think it's off the wall myself. And this author also does. And he has quite a few other examples. So I think we just need to be aware that here is a section called "Lying Signs and Wonders." Okay? Can signs and wonders deceive us? Yeah, we can be. So "All that glitters is not gold." Okay?

Many of these famous evangelists of our modern times--I'm very doubtful about them. Now you might say, "Well, but they're doing good." Well, maybe they are. The Lord can do well with anybody. The Lord can use the devil actually to bring about his will. But some of them are very peculiar. Just because someone is on TV and because they have a huge audience does not mean that they're solid or that they're really doing the Lord's will. Hypnotism is involved with some of them. And things like shaking and all kinds of things where the whole body is acting very strangely--I would say on all that stuff, be very careful.

And in terms of your reading matter, there is a Catholic bookstore up here on Ogden Avenue; there is a Catholic bookstore in Wheaton. And even those books every one of them is not Catholic. I'm not saying only read Catholics, but read solid books. You know, don't just read everything. Because it says Lord in it doesn't mean you should read it, you know, or because somebody claims to know God it doesn't mean that they do. So those are some things. That's the second thing.

### **Part III**

The third thing I want to talk about is the role of apparitions in the life of the Church. Now we believe in the Church that there are such things as apparitions, and what that means is that someone beholds either Christ, the Blessed Mother, or a saint. And in itself there is no problem with that. Sure, that could happen. But usually apparitions are connected with messages, and there the problem comes in. But the Church teaches--and if you really want a good book on this Benedict Groschell has written some very good things on discernment in regard to apparitions, because apparitions tend to create a cult, you know. It's like, oh, did you hear? Oh, no, I didn't hear. Well, you're out of it; I'm in. Now I'm going to tell you. See? Well, that's not so good. And then people start to visit certain places, and that could be good or it could be bad. And I think in many cases a lot of good can come out of what is in itself neutral. But good and bad can be mixed too. So, for example, people can go to shrines and maybe have a conversion experience. And you think isn't that beautiful? Yeah, that is; and for that person that was good. But then the next person goes, and they come back and they may be really "out of it"! And I've experienced both with, for example, Medjugorje. I've known people who have gone to Medjugorje and come home with a real sense of God in their lives, and I've also known people to go to Medjugorje and come back more goofy than they were when they left. So

you do have to be careful. You know, just because, let's say for the sake of a conversation--and the Church has not spoken on this--but let's say the Blessed Mother really did appear at Medjugorje. Let's say that happened. That doesn't mean everyone who goes there and comes home and tells you about it is telling you something that's true. See? That's the whole problem with messages! Anybody can tell you a message, and that could be really nothing more than a rumor! Well, I heard--well, yeah, but is that true? So be very careful about all this. So the Church says this: when a message agrees with the revelation of God and the teaching of the Church, then it approves of it. Now when the Church approves a message, it doesn't mean it's saying that indeed it was given. That's not what the Church says. It just says that it's fine; it agrees with our teaching so you may believe it. It doesn't say you must believe it. It doesn't say the Blessed Mother really gave it or someone else. It doesn't say that. Now Benedict Groschell says, "There are certain messages that are very dangerous. And they read this way, 'If blaa, blaa, blaa, then.'" He says, "Be very careful of any message that is framed like this no matter where you hear it from." See? You could say, "The Blessed Mother at Fatima said, 'If you do this, then this will result,' or the Blessed Mother at Medjugorje said, 'if you do this, then this.'" Benedict Groschell says to be very, very careful of anything like that because God doesn't act that way. God doesn't say, well if you do this, then I'll do that. That isn't God-like. That isn't the way God ever dealt with people in the Old Testament or in the New Testament. That isn't the way Christ teaches. That would mean God somehow has changed. So you have to be very careful of that. And here's the thing--there are so many different possibilities, for example, could the Blessed Mother have appeared at Medjugorje originally on the side of the hill, truly? Yes. And then could subsequent, so-called apparitions be phony? Yes. It could be partially true and partially false. That's why the Church is very careful about these things. And in your spiritual life as you become--I've noticed people becoming more alert to the Holy Spirit; sometimes they get carried away with such things as apparitions, and reports of apparitions, and messages. They think oh, that's a message for me. Wait a minute! Now if God really has a message for you, there are various ways in which it can come. Don't go running off just because someone tells you that at some place where the Blessed Mother appeared she or he heard something. See? So be careful about this. That's all part of discernment. Weigh it with what the Church teaches. See whether it makes sense. Don't judge a totality--in other words, Christians have gone for years to Lourdes, and many people have been helped with healings. But have you ever heard of a message from Lourdes? I never have. Why? I don't know. But on the other hand, Fatima--people are coming all the time with all kinds of new messages supposedly from Fatima. Well, that happened in 1918, so how could there be any new messages now? So this is a question.

Question about who a message is meant for.

It could be; that's another possibility. It could be meant for you and not for anybody else. That's right.

Comment on people not familiar with Scripture.

That's correct, because the Scriptures are the model of how God deals with us. That's why we have them. And another point that I thought of when you were speaking is some people if they look like fools, that's not so bad. It's when they seem to be completely correct and utterly so--that's when they're more dangerous! So just be aware of this.