

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Religious Discernment Eighth Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, March 4, 2014 8:15 AM
1 Pt 1:10-16; Mk 10:28-31 (St. Casimir) (We want to be willing to see the work of God and the fruit of the Spirit wherever it happens to be, but not where it isn't.)

We are continuing the **Letter of Peter**, and the theme is salvation, especially **salvation as understood by the early Church**. He mentions that angels longed to look into these mysteries that the Holy Spirit is revealing. Angels are very intelligent and yet they don't know everything. Many human beings are very intelligent, but they don't know everything either. **So we have to keep in mind the difference between divine wisdom and human wisdom**. So human wisdom can be great, but it is not divine wisdom. Angelic wisdom, angelic intelligence, can be very great, but it is not knowledge of the whole mystery of God.

It is precisely for this mystery of God that we are created. **We are created to seek God, to love and to serve God in this life and to live with God in eternity**. That is the basis for all religious longing, all religious seeking, all religious behavior. That is the origin of it. But along the way **human beings can become very distracted**. We can be distracted **by the world** and all of its various entertainments and allurements, but we also can be distracted **by the Evil One**. The Evil One has a way of disturbing and distorting various goods within the human nature, including the desire for God. So **there are elements within the human religious traditions that are really not from God and don't lead to God**. They lead away from God. St. Paul remarked about that. He said some people thinking that they are worshiping God are really worshipping demons, which is to say **we have to discern everything**. St. John said that: "Discern all spirits."

During the Middle Ages someone thought up this idea: "Outside the Church there is no salvation." Well, that's not exactly true, and missionaries found that wasn't true. I mentioned before, William James said **there is a universal concept of holiness**. Well, that's what

missionaries found when they went out into various places. They had never heard of Christ, but they knew what a saint was. Gradually the Church came to acknowledge this. Vatican II made it clear. **There are works of God in all places, all peoples.** It's not simply within the Church, although it's very important that we have the gospel preached, that we propagate the faith, that we have a sacramental life. But it's not only there that God works; God works everywhere, and has been working everywhere at all times in all people. **But that doesn't mean everything religious is good.** This is a conclusion people have jumped to that all religions are good. Not necessarily. God is leading everyone, but some religions are actually distortions, and **there are distortions in all religions, even in ours.** We have to be wary. We have to be aware. We have to be discerning about everything. **Where is it leading? That's the essence of discernment.**

Where is this taking me? Where is this taking us?

We affirm that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God, the self-disclosure of God. We don't affirm that about anybody else. It doesn't mean others are not prophets. Of course there are prophets, but they are not exactly the revelation of God. Moses was a great prophet; he is not the revelation of God. There is no one like Christ. He is unique. There are other holy people, yes, but Christ is unique. We have to keep that in mind. **It is always through Christ that we can really see what is authentic, what really leads to God.** Anything that goes against Christ cannot lead to God; it's a distortion; it's a deception. That's what Peter is trying to get to in his letter. We have to always keep our eyes on Christ. So we want to be open-minded, but not open-minded in a stupid way. **We want to be willing to see the work of God and the fruit of the Spirit wherever it happens to be, but not where it isn't. That's discernment: knowing the difference.** It's very important today more than ever. Today more than ever so many people, including great intellectuals, are very confused about what is true.