

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Discernment of Spirits**    Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time    Monday, July 31, 2017  
8:15 AM    Ex 32:15-24, 30-34;    **Mt 13:31-35**    **St. Ignatius of Loyola**, priest    (One can reflect on one's own experience to discern what is of God and what isn't.)

**“I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world.”**

That is more or less the **goal of all religion** to open up the basic meaning and purpose of creation, **to connect people to their source**. And there are many different ways of going about this. **Every once in a while someone comes with a new insight into how we can be connected; such a person was Ignatius of Loyola.**

He suffered a very serious wound which most people would consider a terrible misfortune, but in his case turned in to be a great fortune. He was very fortunate to have been wounded and laid up for a long time. This gave his mind time. **Too often in our lives we don't give our minds time. Many blessings can come from what appears to be misfortune.**

Now he was always a reader; he liked reading. In particular he liked **reading stories of derring-do, knights in armor**, what we might call “trash.” But when he would read those things, **when he was finally tired, he would also be quite dry and depressed.** Now it happened in the place where he was staying there were **some books about saints**, especially Francis and Dominic, who were two of the most important saints of the Middle Ages. And reading about them really started to get him thinking. Well in what way was he different from them? He could do all the things they were doing. In fact the more he thought about this, the more excited he became. **And when he got tired, he was still left with a wonderful sense of peace and consolation.** In time, because this happened over and over again, he developed this idea, this if you want to call it practice, of **the discernment of spirits**. I'm sure that before his time other spiritually minded people had noticed this, but no one ever wrote it down. No one ever talked about it.

So he brought this observation, this insight, that **one can reflect on one's own experience to discern what is of God and what isn't**. The idea being that if something is of God, it will leave us with a sense of consolation and peace, that is presuming, as he pointed out later, that you really want the will of God in your life. **You actually have to want the will of God for something from God to bring you peace and consolation**. If, for example, you don't want the will of God, if you've never really decided to follow the will of God, well in that case something from God will actually make you disturbed and upset and provoke all kinds of things. That's because it's trying to stir something up. But if you have actually wanted God in your life and that's a sincere desire, then the gifts of God will leave you consoled and at peace. In this way you can discern what is of God and what isn't.

Now he never said that **stories of drama or fiction** were bad or evil. **He just said they lead nowhere**. And that is the truth of also much in our world. It isn't actually bad or evil in the true sense, but it just leads nowhere. And we can tell that if having tasted whatever it is: literature, activities, entertainment, amusements, sports, whatever it is, if when we are tired and we walk away, we feel dried out and even depressed, **that tells us something about the intrinsic worth**, whatever it is, we're engaged in. This is the discernment of spirits. It's very important for us to practice.