



## Your Best Yes, Week 1 - Discernment

Well, it's Advent. But I suppose most people don't really care because Christmas pretty much starts the day after Halloween. For the next month, our culture is 100% in Christmas mode. We know this will probably be the busiest time of the whole year, that it will fly by - in no time at all, sometimes, however, feeling as if it will never end.

Some of you are like me, and you love it all. And some of you are like my cousin, Joan and you hate it all. And some of you, probably most of you, actually have mixed feelings about it. But no matter where you fall on the spectrum, we're all in the same boat with limited time and resources to face everything that's coming our way in this month.

And here's the problem. It's all good. It's mostly all good stuff. I mean, dinners, and dances, and parties, and Christmas concerts, and pageants, and plays, and gift buying, and gift-wrapping, and gift exchanging, and gift returning, it's all good.

It just doesn't all fit. Especially since the rest of our life proceeds more or less, as usual, we've still got jobs to do, we've still got work to attend to, and we still got classes to sit in. You've got to clean your house and do your shopping according to the same schedule, and deal with little kids and aging parents and all the other issues that you're currently dealing with that don't go away and don't go on hold just because the holidays are here.

That's part of it.

The other part of the problem is it can be difficult to know what to do, and then, what to do next, and, of course, what not to do at all. It's a good problem. It means we're blessed with family, and friends, and opportunities, and resources, but it is a problem nonetheless. All these good stuff can start feeling like pressure, and sometimes it can become oppressive, and sometimes it can become overwhelming. And maybe there's no avoiding that, but you don't have to be anxious about it. You know, you don't have to be anxious and angry and annoyed. There's a big difference between being busy and being anxious, angry, and annoyed because we're busy.

And if you think about it, if you step back and think about it, the holiday season is almost like a microcosm for the whole of our life. This month is this intense little experience of what really is going on day in and day out through the whole of our life because life is an ever-changing menu of options and choices that just keep coming our way. And what we're doing with them is determining the quality and direction of our life. Whether we're thinking about it or not, what we're doing with all of those choices is determining the quality and direction of our lives.

So we need a strategy. That's all. We need a plan for the holidays for sure. A strategy that we can use to a more consistent, sustainable, successful living in 2019.

There was a great Saint who lived in the 16th century, Ignatius Loyola. And St. Ignatius had a strategy for exactly what we're talking about it. He called this process discernment. Discernment is about judgment, but not just decision-making. It's more about sensitivity, when it comes to decision-making - discerning not just the good from the bad, but the good from the greater good, and the greater good from the greatest good.

When life presents more than one good option, discernment is about reflecting on the best one, the one that represents the best use of our time and resources. The one that has the greatest impact to do the most good.

There are **three basic principles** that I want to share with you throughout the course of this series. The **first principle** of discernment goes like this. **We need to discern from the truth that is God.** Here's a truth that is God. God actually wants to get involved and really help you out when it comes to making good and great decisions in life and about life.

God wants you to make positive, healthy, life-giving choices. God wants to lead you down the path of an abundant life. God wants you to see every day of your life as his gift to you. Not just something to be gotten through, but a gift that he has given you. So, many people approach life, not to mention Christmas, as something simply to be gotten through. But that's not how God wants us to live. We'll find our best yes when we invite God into the decision-making process.

The **second principle** of discernment is this. **We need to discern from the truth that is ourselves.** You need to discern the truth about yourself. It's amazing how quickly we forget who we are, our personality, our interest, our ability, our giftedness.

Discernment is asking God what we should do based upon who he has made us to be. **I'll say that again.** Discernment is asking God what we should do based upon who he has made us to be. And no matter who he has made you to be, here's one truth I know to be true about you. God has made you free to make decisions. He's made you capable of discernment. He's given you a capacity to choose.

So often we act like we don't have any choice, especially at Christmas. But we do have a choice. It's a choice; you choose to say, "Yes," just like you can choose to say, "No." You can actually say, "No." It could become a very powerful word for you this Christmas. You're free to say, "No" to overcoming and over-scheduling yourself and your family, again, this year. You can say, "No" to all the demands of all of the in-laws, so you can say, "No," to every silly and selfish impulse that your kids will be dishing up this holiday season.

The best, "Yes," is often preceded by a firm, "No."

It's hard. And it's harder this time of year than any other time of year because you want to please everyone. I get it, you want to please everyone. It's not wrong to want to please everyone. It's not wrong. It's just impossible. Let me say that again. It's not wrong to want to please everyone. It's impossible. We have the freedom to say, "No," and people in our lives need to accept that. Ignatius teaches a third principle for discernment which he finds in Scripture.

And it's perfectly stated in today's second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. Paul prays for his friends, and all of us, that we'll increase and abound in love. Our best yes, our greatest good will ultimately come from love and the desire to love. Spiritual discernment is based on love.

So, the **third principle** that we're looking to is **our need to discern from the truth that is love**. You might be wondering how can saying "No" be a reflection of love, but all of your parents out there know that well. Often the most loving answer, the most generous answer is "No." Besides, it doesn't matter what we do this holiday if we're not growing in love, accepting every invitation, attending every party, seeing every relative, finding every gift, getting the cutest possible picture of our kids for the cutest possible Christmas card ever, is ultimately of little or no value. It might even be a waste of time without love.

So, over the next few weeks, we're going to be looking at that. We're going to look at how we can grow to love God, to love others, and inspired by that love, to make disciples through spiritual discipleship. Next week, we're going to begin by talking about growing in love toward God. We'll point out some simple, easy things that we can do this season.

In two weeks, we are going to look at loving others. We always want to be growing in love toward the people around us. Then, in three weeks, we'll look at how we can reach out to our unchurched friends and family by inviting them to Christmas Eve.

The gospel passage today from Luke refers to strange and spooky future events, signs in the sun, and the moon, and the stars. Nations in disarray, people in distress. Fearful things for sure. What should we do? What's his counsel and advice to us? Pretty simple, he says, "Beware of the anxieties of daily life." Beware of the anxieties of daily life. That could be a guiding verse for us in this whole holiday season.

Beware of the anxieties of daily life. This Christmas is probably going to be busy for sure, but it can be busy without anxiety, and anger, and anxiousness. **Invite God into your busyness, choose to give him, and yourself, the Christmas gift of your very best YES.**