

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Third Sunday of Advent • Year B • December 13, 2020



*Eternal God,
we proclaim your greatness
and your limitless mercy.*

*You have come
to our rescue in
promising us a savior.*

*We rejoice in you,
O God, and acclaim
you as the Holy One
whose faithfulness is
constant and everlasting.*

Amen.

Sunday Word

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11
Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Sent By the Lord

Isaiah the prophet declares that he has been sent by the Lord to announce a jubilee year. God favors his people and, gifted by the Almighty, his people rejoice!

Preserved Blameless

The Christian community in Thessalonica gives thanks to God, rejoices, and prays constantly. They pray that the Lord may preserve them as blameless as they await the coming of Christ.

Already in Their Midst

John the Baptist offers testimony regarding the Messiah, the Christ. In response, the people do not understand. They question him multiple times. John points out to the people that the Messiah is already in their midst, yet they do not recognize him.

Church Teaching: Discernment

Hearts Attuned

Some of the Jewish authorities come from Jerusalem to question John the Baptist about his preaching about the Messiah. They want to know if he is the Messiah. The Baptist is clear; he is not. In total, the representatives of Jerusalem ask him seven questions in this unique Gospel episode.

The authorities ask because they want to know. They ask because they are attempting to discern the significance of John's ministry and, of course, they are probably also trying to discover the identity of the Messiah. There is no indication in this episode that the authorities come to understand who John the Baptist is and the reason for his ministry. Nor is there any indication that they understand Jesus to be the long-awaited and promised Messiah. They are unable to discern accurately the nature of God's action in the world most likely because they are blinded by their own preconceptions and prerogatives to see clearly.

Listening to the Spirit

The word “discernment” derives from the Latin *discernere*, meaning “to sever, separate, distinguish.” This term carries with it a sense of sifting through the stuff of one’s life in order to respond to the direction that God presents before us. Believers pay attention to truth, faith, values, and conscience to glean how and where the Spirit of God is moving us.

We engage in spiritual discernment because we know that God does not cast us adrift. Jesus saved us from sin and death so that we might attain holiness in life and eternal happiness with God. Indeed, Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit as our Paraclete. He is our Advocate who assists us, consoles us, and guides us to the truth. This promised guidance by the Holy Spirit is the basis for the Christian notion of discernment, and begins by careful listening to the Spirit.

Elements of Discernment

The process of discernment is quite demanding, yet rewarding and necessary for the believer. Discernment requires *listening*. A believer must listen to one’s conscience. And that conscience is to be formed by the teachings of the Church, which in turn are based on the truth, goodness, and beauty of God’s plan of creation and Salvation. Discernment also requires *constant practice* and fine-tuning as the events and stages of life move forward—as does our own Christian maturity.

Finally, discernment requires *humility*. The Holy Spirit brings us into communion with Christ when we take on a humble heart. We see this evident by the first believers: the Virgin Mary, Joseph her husband, and some simple fishermen who became the first disciples.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

Discernment demands *trust in God*. His divine grace is given to us at every turn, helping us move closer to him. Discernment demands *trust in the Church*. Through reception of the Sacraments, meditation on Sacred Scripture, the cultivation so of a prayer life, and an examination of one’s conscience that one’s mind and heart are properly formed, the Church prepares us to receive God in our lives. Discernment also demands the development of a *discriminating attitude*, that is, a posture of “listening” to the voice of the Spirit in the events of our life.

Key Terms

CONSCIENCE

Interior voice of the person, placed within the heart by God, which helps a person strive for the good and avoid the evil (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1777).

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

In a formal sense, using one’s conscience to prepare for Confession; in an informal sense, any time a person engages their conscience to evaluate what is good or evil (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1454).

PARACLETE

Another name for the Holy Spirit, as found in the Gospel of John (see John 14:16-17; 16:7-11, 13-15; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 692).

Voices of Faith

Those who are traveling, and know that they are traveling, long to reach home, they find the traveling irksome. But if they love traveling, they forget home and don’t want to go back. Our true home is not such that we should put anything else before it.

—Saint Augustine

Answering God requires the believer to make that inner journey which leads him or her to an encounter with the Lord. The encounter is only possible if the person can open his or her heart to God, who speaks in the depths of the conscience. This requires interiority, silence, and watchfulness.

—Pope Benedict XVI

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1694 (imitating the Lord in circumstances of life), 1729 (discerning use of earthly goods), 2690 (discernment given through Holy Spirit)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: Chapter 23, especially the section entitled “Doctrinal Statements,” pages 319-320

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 359 (attaining beatitude), 372 (conscience), 596 (discerning the difference between a “trial” and a “temptation”)