

# God's Voice Within

Fr. Mark Thibodaux

## Session 1 Chapters 1-3

1. On page 1 the author says: "...choices come out of who we are as well as out of what we think. That is why discernment is not a system but a process, and it's a process we must learn, and apply, and then learn some more."

How would you describe the difference between a system and a process? Do you agree with his statement?

2. In reference to the image of the 'unwelcome passenger's p. 22, describe how in your experience an aspect of desolation (fear, anger, disquiet) can be a 'passenger' but not the 'driver'?

Does this image resonate with you, and could it be helpful to a guide who feels stuck?

3. I had a small personal experience of 'peace and tranquility in the midst of desolation' today at the Life Chain. On pages 52 and 53 the author refers to the experience of Peter and John rejoicing to be found worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. Can you think of other examples where "consolation" does not look like what we might expect it to?

## Session 2

### RESPONDING TO DESOLATION & CONSOLATION

Concrete suggestions for how a person can respond to the experiences of desolation and consolation in their lives

### Chapter 4 – WHEN IS DESOLATION

One purpose of studying St. Ignatius Rules for Discernment is to have at our disposal means of putting out the fires of desolation.

RESPONSE WHEN in DESOLATION:

#1: Name the Desolation: eg. Noah's story and Fr. bus trip

"Sometimes the "unamedness" of the experience is the only part of it causing desolation."

QUESTION:

Why is putting a name to the desolation so important.

#2: Avoid making changes or important decisions: eg Teresa's story

QUESTION: This is such an important issue – What patterns of behavior would be evident in a guide that we as guides would need to recognize. What strategies could we offer the guide to "pass through" this time of desolation. do we as guides need to recognize in our guides during

#3: Rely on your support network: (spiritual Guides, mentors)

#4: Consider Potential Logistical, Moral or Psychological problems

QUESTION: Ignatius says that God never causes desolation but that He does allow it. He lists the following as 3 Causes of Desolation:

1. Sin and its natural consequences
2. God allows it in order to "test" me
3. God allows desolation in order to give me the great gift of humility

Can you highlight any examples?

#5: Be aware of the False "angel of light". (Something felt not quite right)

QUESTION:

Was there a time in your life for you or a directee that you would consider that the false spirit came as an "angel of light."

How was that spirit recognized and what responses proved useful.

#6: Be firm with the false spirit and work diligently

“RESIST” from 8 day Sp. Ex. “ACT AGAINST” with intensified activity (“somewhat more prayer)

QUESTION: as a director what would not be the best response for a director that has a tendency to scrupulosity”

#7: Be gentle, patient and encouraging to yourself

#8: Have faith that God will make good use of this desolation

WHEN IN CONSOLATION- “there is an interior movement aroused in the soul by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and the Lord....”

Loved the quote –“In souls that progressing to greater perfection, the action of the good angel is delicate, gentle and delightful. It may be compared to a drop of water penetrating a sponge.”

QUESTION:

A. Why is it important to reflect on times of desolation during times of consolation?

B. If consolation is the ideal time to work on desolation, why are we so hesitant to do so?

NOTE: Think it could be very revealing for us to meditate on Fr. Fred Kammer’s homily from the VOW CEREMONY ( on page 109)

## PREPARATIONS WHEN in CONSOLATION

#1 Observe the “course of the thoughts” - Beginning, middle and end

(Page 112) Like this as he refers to how our thoughts are “threads” “woven through the pre-desolation, the beginning, the middle and the end. And that discovering this thread could be a huge breakthrough in my pursuit of self-awareness”. I know this to be true.

#2 Attend to vulnerabilities

A. Review DEFENSE MECHANISMS on pg 115

1. Passivity and Avoidance
2. Aggression
3. Passive-aggressive behavior
4. Displacement
5. Repression

QUESTION: The Magnificat had an essay by Sister Burrows on the “**electrified carriage**” (Many of us see the church and the faith, as we call it, like an insulated, armoured, electrified carriage in which we can sit secure behind curtained windows as we hurtle through the dark forests.) where she asks how open are we to drawing back the curtain of our secure carriage and honestly looking at the wounds – ours and those around us”

- A. Which of the above do you find most common in your directees?
- B. How difficult do you think it is for individuals to see “patterns” in their own behaviour that hinder them from overcoming their vulnerability?
- C. Review Building fortifications (pg 117)so that desolation does not get the best of me.

### #3 Look out for False Consolations

QUESTION: Name a couple instances when “false consolations” are most likely to occur in your life or the life of your director.

Why does Father caution us that ALL our actions, even those that spring from consolation, should be carefully examined?

### #4 Seek God’s Presence in the painful moments of your past.( and our choice to believe!)

QUESTION: Loved the story of Fr. Duy Nguyen and the detailing of the purpose of this book – an outlining of the process of discernment through the ebbs and flows of desolation and consolation– and how on his retreat this process is detailed.

In the end God asks Father the question we all must answer – once having stayed the course – would you change the outcome.pg 123

“...because only when we reflect on our experiences can we engage our interior life effectively and learn from it.”

St. Ignatius stresses the need to practice:

1. Spiritual Direction
2. Spiritual Journaling
3. Times of QUIET PRAYER

QUESTION: WHY?

### Session 3

#### From Discerning Spirits to Making Decisions

Phase 1 - 'Before Making a Decision: Laying a Foundation' - Fr. Thibodeaux compares St. Ignatius' 'First Principle & Foundation' to a parish or corporate 'Mission Statement'. "Our one desire and choice should be - What is more conducive to the end for which we are created?" (p. 133)

How would this awareness by a directee of the 'end for which she was created' help her in her decision making process? Have you encountered situations where a directee (or yourself) encountered difficulties because of the lack of a 'bigger vision' of Life's purpose?

Phase 2 - 'Gather Data' - Fr. Mark discusses how the tendency of a person to be a hasty or hesitant decision maker can sometimes exclude God's Will from the process. (p. 163)

Have you seen different types of temperaments in your directees lean towards one or the other of the 'hasty or hesitant' style of decision making? How did you help them see how they needed to be aware of and work with their God given human temperament when drawn too much one way or the other?

Phase 3 - 'Dream the Dreams - Tapping into Deep Desires' - at the very beginning of the discernment process we were taught to seek indifference of the heart and the will, so that now - while grounded in holy indifference - we can pick up again the desires of the heart. We now allow the 'great desires' to drive the bus - and consider the best case scenarios and greatest potentialities. (p. 167)

Have you encountered a situation where you or a directee was stuck in a narrow type of tunnel vision regarding a possibility but by God's grace were led to a much greater vision? What helped to broaden the previously restricted 'vision'?

Phase 4 - 'Ponder the Dreams - Weighing Consolation and Desolations' Fr. Thibodeaux says that a tell-tale sign of God's Will in a particular option being considered is a 'deep down' peace (as opposed to simply feeling comfortable about it) even if there may be unpleasant fall out. (p. 171)

Have you experienced this type of deep down peace despite negative repercussions and how would you help a directee to see past the difficult fallout when they seem to be stuck in fear at that point ?

'The pinnacle of discernment is when peace and inflamed energy accompany an option.' Earlier in the book Fr. Thibodeaux warned of a situation where this sense of inflamed energy may be wrongly interpreted by the person experiencing it. ( p. 176) What type of situation could this occur in, and how can a directee be helped to avoid it ?

Book Study closing reflections – what were some of the most valuable ideas, points or processes that you learned while reading this book that will be helpful either in your own personal spiritual journey or to help those you guide ?