



Free Listening Hearts Program Materials

A Primer on Spiritual Discernment: Topic 6

Engaging the Imagination

In more than twenty-five years of Listening Hearts experience, every dramatic breakthrough in discernment has come through a creative encounter with an art form or an image from nature or a relevant analogy. This usually comes after the period of preparation that includes prayer, formulating the discernment question, assembling the best information possible, identifying options, weighing them and coming to a preliminary position on the matter under consideration.

At this time, the real discernment begins. A productive way to proceed is to engage the imagination. One way to go about that is to select a category that appeals to you and feels right for you at this moment. Some examples: the visual arts, music, sports, science, history, literature, or natural beauty. If you love sports you could open yourself to a sports analogy that might inform your concern. If you are a music lover, is there a particular piece of music that expresses your feelings as you consider the issue before you? If your favorite pastime is reading novels, is there a character in a novel that reminds you of yourself at this time? But do not try to think of an analogy or an historical character or an image from nature. Instead, take your question and your situation into centering silence and hold them at your very center (your gut at the pit of your abdomen, the center of your balance). If you establish a category and stay centered, in time something is likely to spring up from your depths. If it does, engage with it. Explore associations. In your imagination try to experience sights and sounds, taste, smells and textures. What do they suggest to you? What do they tell you about yourself? How do they inform the question? Release yourself to the flow of the Spirit to go wherever that may take you.

You may need to conclude because of time or you may simply sense that it is time to move on. Ideally, two more steps will follow in whatever sequence fits your circumstances. One, it is important to observe and interpret the signs of the Spirit, which you will find as Topic 8 of this Primer. And second, if at all possible, find at least one other person of spiritual depth with whom you can share your reflections in a contemplative manner (see Topic 7 of this Primer).

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Symbols that bubble to the surface from deep within have the power to carry us to new places that can broaden our perspective, refine our concept of truth, deepen our compassion and draw us into more intimate relationships with God and other people.

– Farnham and Grayson, *Keeping in Tune with God*, p. 31