

Hi Donna,

Below is the sermon which has spin the plate in it. Please note the sermon is not proofed, and the punctuation may be set as a cue for my talking points.

PAX,

John

We are almost half way through the season of Lent. A season where we are to reflect upon our actions in the sight of God, repent and change our ways in order to prepare ourselves for Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. We often think of Lent as the season when we give up something we desire as a sign of penance. It is really more appropriate to give up things that are harming us and keeping us from being in relationship with God, but to do this we need to know what God is calling us to do. For this reason, I find that the season of Lent to be a season for discernment, what is it that God wants for us? How is God acting in our lives?

As I read and studied the gospel lesson for today, I was struck by two passages within the lesson: Jesus says "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." and "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work." We know that Jesus came to dwell on earth to be with us and be an example for us of how we are to be in relationship with God. The only way I know to be in relationship with God in spirit and truth is to discern God's will for each of us and to complete the work he gives us. Just as Jesus did, we need to always try and discern God's will for us.

Discernment is not easy. I know most of my discernment has come and still does come to me from others. When asked to take on a new ministry, I would generally say let me pray and think about this before accepting or rejecting the request. I often found some of my most rewarding ministries were the ones that I almost did not do or that I did for all the wrong reasons without listening for God's will in them. Let me give you a couple of examples. In the 1980's when I was asked to become a layreader and chalice bearer, I was not really interested in doing this ministry. Since Sue was in the Choir and she had also been asked to take on this ministry, I thought to myself if I accept I will be able to sit and worship with my wife. That was enough for me. What I later realized was that God had been calling me to do this ministry. This has been one of my most rewarding ministries. Another example was the first time I became an acolyte master. One day after acknowledging that I had been a Sunday School teacher our priest, Peter, asked me if I would become the assistant acolyte master. I knew immediately this was not a ministry I wanted to do. I told him, I really was not a Sunday School teacher. I had been called a co-teacher working with the fourth grade class with my wife. In reality I did not do any of the teaching and was just a go-for person helping put out supplies and get things. Our priest said he really needed to get some help for Gordan the acolyte

master who was overworked. After thinking about this for a short period and thinking to myself, “oh it can only be for a couple of years. We will transfer by then.” I reluctantly agreed. Well within a month Gordan had resigned and I was it. The love and understanding of God’s love that I gained from this ministry will remain with me forever. In each of these cases I was fed spiritually all the food necessary to do the work God asked of me to do.

I learned another lesson about discernment during my first tenure as an acolyte master. Discernment of God’s will is not always related to what ministries we are to do. Discernment of God’s will can also be related to how we see ourselves and others. Shortly after becoming the acolyte master, I needed to talk with Peter about acolyte training. The only time Peter could meet with me was just after his Wednesday morning Peace Mass. At the Peace Mass the congregation of St. Michael’s and All Angles prayed for world peace, a world without strife and war, domestic peace, tranquility in our homes without domestic violence, and peace from the issues in our life that cause pain or suffering. Peter knew that I was in the military, but he had never seen me in uniform. I think for Peter it was out of sight out of mind. Peter had graduated from Berkley and after seminary he became the Berkley campus ministry chaplain. To Peter the military industrial complex was the enemy. As it turned out, my schedule required me to brief a dignitary immediately after my return to the Air Force base. Since meeting with Peter was immediately following the Wednesday morning Peace service, I decided to attend that service. I arrived a little late and waked into Church just as Peter was starting his homily. When Peter saw me holding my hat with lightning bolts and thunder clouds on the brim, in my dress blue uniform with a master missile combat crew badge and the rack of ribbons on my chest, his jaw dropped to his knees. There standing in middle of his Wednesday morning Peace Mass was the enemy. Peter could have just written me off at that moment, but being spirit led and searching for truth he re-assessed his understanding through prayer and discernment. I was later told that my coming into his Peace Mass had been an awakening for him. He decided it was far better to have Christians called by God to service in the military than men and women who had no faith and no guidance from God.

One evening while visiting my Brother-in-law’s home for dinner, my nephew asked his father to place some ketchup on his plate. My nephew said, “Daddy, put some ketchup right here”, pointing to a spot on his plate. His father poured some ketchup on his plate near his french fries, at which point my nephew screamed, “No!. Not there. Here.”, as he pointed to the spot that he wanted the ketchup. Nothing seemed to work to get my nephew settled down and he kept pointing to the spot until his father calmly reached over and spun my nephew’s plate around until the ketchup was at the spot my nephew kept pointing to. Then all was well. It was just a matter of perspective. I think this is what God did for Peter in his discernment. God spun the plate around so that Peter could see through another perspective. I learned from this experience that there are multiple ways of looking at people and events. We are called to always try and discern God’s perspective. Maybe we need to let God spin our plates around to see that perspective.

I spoken a lot about discernment today, and I think when most people think of discernment they think about discernment in relationship to seeking holy orders. I hope you can see from these reflections that discernment is something for us all and it is not related solely to seeking holy orders. Discernment is what each Christian must do to determine God's will for each of us. We are indeed fortunate here in the Diocese of New Hampshire to have a formalized discernment program for congregational discernment to help lay people seek and understand God's will for each of us. In the diocese of Maine there is a formalized program for individual discernment for all people, not just those seeking Holy Orders. It might interest you to know that a large part of the early work on this discernment program was done by our Vicar Pat. She has a lot of experience in the area of discernment. I functioned as a facilitator for a group in doing discernment in the Maine program. The program required a group of nine meetings, meeting for a couple of hours per meeting. I challenge each of you to consider how you might discern God's will for you. What ministries are you called to do? What is God asking you to do? How is God working in your life? Be a true worshiper of the Father, take the time to seek his spirit and truth. You may just find a new and rewarding call from God where all the spiritual nourishment necessary to complete the work he calls you to is provided.

