

POPE FRANCIS
GENERAL AUDIENCE
Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 31 August 2022

Catechesis On Discernment:
1. What does it mean to discern?

Dear brothers and sisters, good day!

Today we begin a new series of catechesis: we have finished the catechesis on old age, now we begin a new series dealing with discernment. Discernment is an important act that concerns everyone, because decisions are an essential part of life. Discerning decisions. One chooses food, clothing, a course of study, a job, a relationship. In all of these, a life project is realised, and even our relationship with God is concretized.

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of discernment with images taken from ordinary life ; for example, he describes the fishers who select the good fish and discard the bad ones; or the merchant who knows how to identify, among many pearls, the one of greatest value. Or he who, ploughing a field, comes across something that turns out to be a treasure (*cf. Mt 13:44-48*).

In the light of these examples, discernment presents itself as an exercise of intelligence, and also of skill and also of will, to seize the opportune moment: these are the conditions for making a good choice. It takes intelligence, skill, and also will to make a good choice. And there is also a price required for discernment to become effective. To perform his trade to the best of his ability, the fisherman reckons with hard work, long nights spent at sea, and then the fact of discarding some of the catch, accepting a loss of profit for the sake of those for whom it is intended. The pearl merchant does not hesitate to spend everything to buy that pearl; and so does the person who has stumbled upon a treasure. These are unexpected, unplanned situations, where it is crucial to recognise the importance and urgency of a decision to be made.

Everyone has to make decisions; there is no one to make them for us. At a certain point, adults can freely ask for advice, reflect, but the decision is our own. We can't say, 'I lost this, because my husband decided, my wife decided, my brother decided'. No. You have to decide, each of us has to decide, and for this reason, it is important to know how to discern. In order to decide well, it is necessary to know how to discern.

The Gospel suggests another important aspect of discernment: it involves the emotions. The one who has found the treasure feels no difficulty in selling everything, so great is his joy (*cf. Mt 13:44*). The term used by the evangelist Matthew indicates a very special joy, which no human reality can give; and indeed it recurs in very few other passages of the Gospel, all of which refer to the encounter with God. It is the joy of the wise men when, after a long and arduous journey, they see the star again (*cf. Mt 2:10*); the joy, it is the joy of the women who return from the empty tomb after hearing the angel's announcement of the resurrection (*cf. Mt 28:8*). It is the joy of those who have found the Lord. Making a good decision, a right decision, always leads you to that final joy; perhaps along the way you have to suffer a bit of uncertainty, thinking, seeking, but in the end the right decision blesses you with joy.

In the final judgement God will exercise discernment — the great discernment — with regard to us. The images of the farmer, the fisherman, and the merchant are examples of what happens in the Kingdom of Heaven, a Kingdom that manifests itself in the ordinary actions of life, which require us to take a stand. This is why it is so important to be able to discern: great choices can arise from circumstances that at first sight seem secondary, but turn out to be decisive. For example, let us think of Andrew and John's first encounter with Jesus, an encounter that stems from a simple question: "**Rabbi, where do you live?**" — "**Come and see**", says Jesus (*cf. Jn 1:38-39*). A very brief exchange, but it is the beginning of a change that, step by step, will mark their whole life. Years later, the Evangelist will continue to remember that encounter that changed him forever, and he will even remember the time: 'It was about four o'clock in the afternoon' (*v. 39*). It is the hour when time and the eternal met in his life. And in a good decision, correct, there is an encounter between God's will and our will; there is an encounter between the present path and the eternal. Making the right decision, after a path of discernment, is to make this encounter: time with eternity.

So: knowledge, experience, emotion, will. These are some of the indispensable elements of discernment. In the course of these catechesis we will see others, equally important.

Discernment — as I've said — involves hard work. According to the Bible, we do not find set before us, pre-packaged, the life we are to live. No! We have to decide it all the time, according to the reality that comes. God invites us to evaluate and choose: He created us free and wants us to exercise our freedom. Therefore, discerning is demanding.

We have often had this experience: choosing something that seemed good to us and yet was not. Or knowing what our true good was and not choosing it. Human beings, unlike animals, can be wrong, can be unwilling to choose correctly. And the Bible shows this from its very first pages. God gives a human being a precise instruction: if you want to live, if you want to enjoy life, remember that you are a creature, that you are not the criterion of good and evil, and that the choices you make will have a consequence, for you, for others and for the world (*cf. Gen 2:16-17*); you can make the earth a magnificent garden or you can make it a desert of death. A fundamental teaching: it is no coincidence that this is the first dialogue between God and man. The dialogue is: the Lord gives the mission, you have to do this and that; and with every step that people take, they have to discern which decision to make. Discernment is that reflection of the mind, of the heart, that we have to do before making a decision.

Discernment is demanding but indispensable for living. It requires that I know myself, that I know what is good for me here and now. Above all, it requires a filial relationship with God. God is Father and He does not leave us alone, He is always willing to advise us, to encourage us, to welcome us. But He never imposes His will. Why? Because He wants to be loved and not feared. And also, God wants children, not slaves: free children. And love can only be lived in freedom. To learn to live, one must learn to love, and for this it is necessary to discern: what can I do now, faced with this alternative? Let it be a sign of greater love, of greater maturity in love. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us! Let us invoke Him every day, especially when we have choices to make.

Thank you.

POPE FRANCIS
GENERAL AUDIENCE
Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 7 September 2022

Catechesis On Discernment: 2. An example: Ignatius of Loyola

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning! We are continuing our reflection on discernment — during this time we will speak about spiritual discernment every Wednesday — and in doing so, referring to a specific witness can be helpful to us.

One of the most instructive examples is offered to us by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, with a decisive episode in his life. Ignatius was at home convalescing after injuring a leg in battle. To dispel the boredom, he asked for something to read. He loved tales of chivalry, but unfortunately, there were only the lives of the saints at home. Somewhat reluctantly, he adapted, but in the course of reading, he began to discover another world, a world that won him over and seemed to compete with that of knights. He was fascinated by the figures of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, and felt the desire to imitate them. But the world of chivalry also continued to exert its fascination on him. Thus, he felt within himself this alternation of thoughts — those of chivalry and those of the saints — which seem to be on par with one another.

Ignatius, however, also began to perceive some differences. In his Autobiography — in the third person — he wrote: “When he thought of worldly things” — and of chivalrous things, of course — “it gave him great pleasure, but afterward he found himself dry and sad. But when he thought of journeying to Jerusalem, and of living only on herbs and practising austerities, he found pleasure not only while thinking of them, but also when he had ceased” (Chapter 8); they left him a trace of joy.

In this experience we note two aspects, above all. The first is *time*: that is, the thoughts of the world are attractive at the beginning, but then they lose their lustre and leave emptiness and discontent; they leave you that way, empty. Thoughts of God, on the contrary, rouse first a certain resistance — “But I’m not going to read this boring thing about saints” — but when they are welcomed, they bring an unknown peace that lasts for a long time.

Here, then, is the other aspect: the *end point* of thoughts. At first the situation does not seem so clear. There is a development of discernment: for example, we understand what is good for us not in an abstract, general way, but in the journey of our life. In the rules for discernment, the fruit of this fundamental experience, Ignatius laid down an important premise, which helps to understand this process: “In the persons who go from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is commonly used to propose to them apparent pleasures” — to reassure them that everything is fine — “making them imagine sensual delights and pleasures in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins. In these persons the good spirit uses the opposite method, pricking them and biting their consciences through the process of reason” (*Spiritual Exercises*, 314). But this will not do.

There is a history that precedes one who discerns, a history that it is indispensable to know, because discernment is not a sort of oracle or fatalism, or something from a laboratory, like casting one’s lot on two possibilities. The great questions arise when we have already travelled a stretch of the road in life, and it is to that journey that we must return in order to understand what we are looking for. If in life we make a little progress, then: “But why am I walking in this direction, what am I looking for?”, and that is where discernment takes place. When he

found himself wounded in his father's house, Ignatius was not thinking of God at all, or of how to reform his own life, no. He had his first experience of God by listening to his own heart, which presented him with a curious reversal: things that were attractive at first sight left him disillusioned, whereas in others, less dazzling, he perceived lasting peace. We too have this experience; very often we begin to think about something, and we stay there, and then we end up disappointed. Instead, when we carry out a work of charity, do something good and feel something of happiness, a good thought comes to us, and happiness comes to us, something of joy. It is an experience that is entirely our own. He, Ignatius, had his first experience of God by listening to his own heart, that showed him a curious reversal. This is what we must learn: to listen to our own heart, to know what is happening, what decision to make. To make a judgement on a situation, one must listen to one's own heart. We listen to the television, the radio, the mobile phone. We are experts at listening, but I ask you: do you know how to listen to your heart? Do you stop to ask: "But how is my heart? Is it satisfied, is it sad, is it searching for something?". In order to make good decisions, one must listen to one's own heart.

This is why Ignatius would go on to suggest reading the lives of the saints, because they show God's style in the lives of people who are not very different from us, in a narrative and comprehensible way; because saints were made of flesh and blood like us. Their actions speak to ours, and they help us understand their meaning.

In that famous episode of the two feelings that Ignatius had, one when he read about knights and the other when he read about the lives of saints, we can recognise another important aspect of discernment, which we already mentioned last time. There is an apparent *randomness* in life's events: everything seems to arise from a banal setback — there were no books about knights, only about the lives of saints, a setback that nonetheless held a possible turning point. Only after some time would Ignatius realize this, at which point he would devote all his attention to it. Listen carefully: God works through un-plannable events that happen by chance, but by chance this happened to me, and by chance I met this person, by chance I saw this film. It was not planned but God works through un-plannable events, and also through setbacks: "But I was supposed to go for a walk and I had a problem with my foot, I can't...". Setback: what is God saying to you? What is life telling you there? We have also seen this in a passage from the Gospel of Matthew: a man ploughing a field accidentally comes across a buried treasure. A totally unexpected situation. But what is important is that he recognises it as the lucky break of his life and decides accordingly: he sells everything and buys that field (cf. 13:44). I will give you a piece of advice: beware of the unexpected. He who says: "But I wasn't expecting this". Is it life speaking to you, is it the Lord speaking to you, or is it the devil? Someone. But there is something to discern: how I react when faced with the unexpected. But I was quiet at home and "Boom!" — my mother-in-law arrives. And how do you react to your mother-in-law? Is it love or something else inside? And you must discern. I was working well in the office, and a companion comes along to tell me he needs money: how do you react? Seeing what happens when we experience things we were not expecting, and learning to know our heart as it moves.

Discernment is the aid in recognising the signals with which the Lord makes himself known in unexpected, even unpleasant situations, as the wounded leg was for Ignatius. A life-changing encounter can arise from them, forever, as in the case of Ignatius. Something can arise that makes you better along the way, or worse, I don't know, but being attentive: the most beautiful narrative thread comes from the unexpected: "How do I act in view of this?" May the Lord help us listen to our hearts and see when it is He who acts, and when it is not and it is something else. Thank you.

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 28 September 2022

Catechesis On Discernment: 3. *The elements of discernment. Familiarity with the Lord*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

We resume our catechesis on the theme of *discernment* — because the theme of discernment is very important in order to know what is going on within us. To know about our feelings and ideas, we have to discern where they come from, where they lead me, to what decisions — and today we focus on the first of its fundamental elements, which is *prayer*. To discern we need to be in an environment, in a state of prayer.

Prayer is an indispensable aid for spiritual discernment, especially when it involves the affective dimension, enabling us to address God with simplicity and familiarity, as one would speak to a friend. It is knowing how to go beyond thoughts, to enter into intimacy with the Lord, with an affectionate spontaneity. The secret of the lives of the saints is familiarity and confidence with God, which grows within them and makes it ever easier to recognize what is pleasing to Him. True prayer is familiarity with and confidence in God. It is not reciting prayers like a parrot, blah, blah, blah, no. True prayer is this spontaneity and affection for the Lord. This familiarity overcomes fear or doubt that his will is not for our good, a temptation that sometimes runs through our thoughts and makes our heart restless and uncertain, or even bitter.

Discernment does not claim absolute certainty, it is not a chemically pure method, it does not claim absolute certainty because it is about life, and life is not always logical. It has many aspects that cannot be enclosed in one category of thought. We would like to know precisely what should be done, yet even when it happens, we do not always act accordingly. How many times have we, too, had the experience described by the apostle Paul, who says: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want" (Rom 7:19). We are not just reason, we are not machines, it is not enough to be given instructions to carry them out: the obstacles, like the supports, to deciding for the Lord are primarily affective, from the heart.

It is significant that the first miracle performed by Jesus in Mark's Gospel is an exorcism (cf. 1:21-28). In the synagogue at Capernaum he delivers a man from the devil, freeing him from the false image of God that Satan has been suggesting since the beginning: that of a God who does not want our happiness. The possessed man in that passage of the Gospel knows that Jesus is God, but this does not lead him to believe in Him. In fact, he says, "Have you come to destroy us" (v. 24).

Many people, even Christians, think the same thing: that is, that Jesus may well be the Son of God, but they doubt that he wants our happiness; indeed, some fear that taking his proposal seriously, the one Jesus proposes to us, means ruining our lives, mortifying our desires, our strongest aspirations. These thoughts sometimes creep up inside us: that God asks too much of us, we fear that God asks too much of us, that he doesn't really love us.

Instead, in our first encounter we saw that the sign of the encounter with the Lord is *joy*. When I encounter the Lord in prayer, I become joyful. Each one of us becomes joyful, a beautiful thing. *Sadness*, or *fear*, on the other hand, are signs of distance from God: "If you would enter life, keep the commandments", Jesus says to the rich young man (*Mt* 19:17). Unfortunately for that young man, some obstacles did not allow him to implement the desire in his heart to follow the "good teacher" more closely. He was an interested, enterprising young man, he had taken the initiative to meet Jesus, but he was also very divided in his affections. For him, riches were too important. Jesus does not force him to make up his mind, but the text notes that the young man turns away from Jesus "sad" (v. 22). Those who turn away from the Lord are never happy, even though they have an abundance of possessions and possibilities at their disposal. Jesus never forces you to follow him, never. Jesus lets you know his will, with all his heart he lets you know things, but he leaves you free. And this is the most beautiful thing about prayer with Jesus: the freedom that he allows you. On the other hand, when we distance ourselves from the Lord, we are left with something sad, something ugly in our heart.

Discerning what is happening within us is not easy, for appearances are deceptive, but *familiarity with God can melt doubts and fears in a gentle way*, making our lives increasingly receptive to his "gentle light," according to the beautiful expression of Saint John Henry Newman. The saints shine with reflected light and show in the simple gestures of their day the loving presence of God, who makes the impossible possible. It is said that two spouses who have lived together for a long time, loving each other, end up resembling each other. Something similar can be said about affective prayer. In a gradual but effective way, it makes us more and more capable of recognizing what counts through connaturality, as something that springs from the depths of our being. To be in prayer does not mean saying words, words, no: being in prayer means opening my heart to Jesus, drawing close to Jesus, allowing Jesus to enter into my heart and making us feel his presence. And there we can discern when it is Jesus and when it is us with our thoughts, that so many times are far from what Jesus wants.

Let us ask for this grace: to live a relationship of friendship with the Lord, as a friend speaks to a friend (cf. Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 53).

I knew an old religious brother who was the doorman of a boarding school, and every time he could, he would approach the chapel, look at the altar, and say, "Hello", because he was close to Jesus. He didn't need to say blah blah blah, no: "Hello, I am close to you and you are close to me". This is the relationship we must have in prayer: closeness, affective closeness, as brothers and sisters, closeness with Jesus. A smile, a simple gesture, and not reciting words that do not reach the heart. As I said, talk to Jesus as a friend talks to another friend.

It is a grace we must ask for one another: to see Jesus as our friend, as our greatest friend, our faithful friend, who does not blackmail, above all who never abandons us, even when we turn away from him. He remains at the door of our heart. "No, with you I don't want to know anything", we say. And he remains silent. He remains close at hand, at heart's reach because he is always faithful. Let us go forward with this prayer, we could say the "prayer of hello", the prayer of greeting the Lord with our heart, the prayer of affection, the prayer of closeness, with few words but with acts and good works.

Thank you.

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 5 October 2022*

Catechesis On Discernment: 4. *The elements of discernment. Self-knowledge*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Let us continue to explore the theme of discernment. Last time we considered prayer, understood as familiarity and confidence with God, as an indispensable element. Prayer, not like parrots, but as familiarity and confidence with God; the prayer of children to their Father; prayer with an open heart. We saw this in the last catechesis. Today I would like, in an almost complementary way, to emphasize that good discernment also requires *self-knowledge*. Knowing oneself. And this is not easy. Indeed, discernment involves our human faculties: memory, intellect, will, affections. Often, we do not know how to discern because we do not know ourselves well enough, and so we do not know what we really want. You have often heard: "But that person, why doesn't he sort out his life? He has never known what he wants...". Without getting to that extreme, but it happens to us too that we do not know clearly what we want, we do not know ourselves well.

Underlying spiritual doubts and vocational crises, there is — not infrequently — insufficient dialogue between religious life and our *human, cognitive and affective dimension*. A writer on spirituality noted how many difficulties on the theme of discernment are indicative of problems of another kind, that should be recognized and explored. This author writes: "I have come to the conviction that the greatest obstacle to true discernment (and to real growth in prayer) is not the intangible nature of God, but the fact that we do not know ourselves sufficiently, and do not even want to know ourselves as we really are. Almost all of us hide behind a mask, not only in front of others, but also when we look in the mirror" (cf. Thomas H. Green, *Weeds Among the Wheat*, 1984). We all have the temptation to wear a mask, even in front of ourselves.

Forgetting God's presence in our life goes hand in hand with our ignorance of ourselves — ignoring God and ignoring ourselves — ignorance of our personality traits and of our deepest desires.

Knowing oneself is not difficult, but it is laborious: it entails *patient soul-searching*. It requires the capacity to stop, to "deactivate the autopilot", to acquire awareness of our way of acting, of the feelings that dwell within us, of the recurrent thoughts that condition us, and often unconsciously. It also requires that we distinguish between emotions and spiritual faculties. "I feel" is not the same as "I am convinced"; "I feel like" is not the same as "I want". Thus, we come to recognize that the view we have of ourselves and of reality is at times somewhat distorted. To realize this is a grace! Indeed, very often it can happen that erroneous convictions about reality, based on past experiences, strongly influence us, limiting our freedom to strive for what really matters in our lives.

Living in the computer age, we know how important it is to know passwords in order to get into programmes where the most personal and valuable information is stored. But spiritual life, too, has its "passwords": there are words that touch our heart because they make

reference to what we are most sensitive to. The tempter, that is, the devil, knows these key words well, and it is important that we know them too, so as not to find ourselves where we do not want to be. Temptation does not necessarily suggest bad things, but often haphazard things, presented with excessive importance. In this way it hypnotizes us with the attraction that these things stir in us, things that are beautiful but illusory, that cannot deliver what they promise, and therefore leave us in the end with a sense of emptiness and sadness. That sense of emptiness and sadness is a sign that we have embarked on paths that were not right, that disoriented us. They can be, for example, degrees, careers, relationships, all things that are in themselves praiseworthy, but towards which, if we are not free, we risk harbouring unreal expectations, such as confirmation of our worth. For example, when you think of a study you are undertaking, do you think only of promoting yourself, of your own interests, or also to serve the community? There, one can see the intentionality of each one of us. The greatest suffering often comes from this misunderstanding because none of those things can be the guarantee of our dignity.

This is why, dear brothers and sisters, it is important to know ourselves, to know the passwords of our heart, what we are most sensitive to, in order to protect ourselves from those who present themselves with persuasive words to manipulate us, but also to recognize what is truly important for us, distinguishing it from current fads or flashy, superficial slogans. Many times, what is said in a television programme, in some advertisement, touches our hearts and makes us go that way without freedom. Be careful about that: am I free, or do I let myself be swayed by the feelings of the moment, or the provocations of the moment?

An aid in this is an *examination of conscience*, but I am not talking about the examination of conscience that we all do when we go to confession, no. That is: "But I sinned in this, that...". No. A general examination of conscience of the day: what happened in my heart during this day? "Lots of things happened...". Which? Why? What traces did they leave in my heart? Carrying out an examination of conscience, that is, the good habit of calmly re-reading what happened during our day, learning to note in our evaluations and choices what we give most importance to, what we are looking for and why, and what we eventually find. Above all, learning to recognize what satisfies my heart. What satisfies my heart? For only the Lord can give us confirmation of what we are worth. He tells us this every day from the cross: he died for us, to show us how precious we are in his eyes. There is no obstacle or failure that can prevent his tender embrace.

The examination of conscience helps a great deal, because in this way we see that our heart is not a road where everything passes without us knowing about it. No. To see: what passed by today? What happened? What made me react? What made me sad? What made me joyful? What was bad, and did I harm others? It is about seeing the path our feelings took, the attractions in my heart during the day. Don't forget! The other day we talked about prayer. Today we are talking about self-awareness.

Prayer and self-knowledge enable us to grow in freedom. This is to grow in freedom! These are basic elements of Christian existence, precious elements for finding one's place in life.

Thank you.

POPE FRANCIS
GENERAL AUDIENCE
Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 12 October 2022

Catechesis on Discernment: 5. *The elements of discernment. The desire*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In these catecheses on discernment we are reviewing the elements of discernment. After prayer, one element, and self-knowledge, another element, that is, praying and knowing oneself, today I would like to talk about another indispensable, so to speak, "ingredient": today I would like to talk about *desire*. In fact, discernment is a form of searching, and searching always stems from something we lack but somehow know, that we intuit.

What kind of knowledge is this? Spiritual teachers refer to it by the term "desire", which, at root, is a nostalgia for fullness that never finds full fulfilment, and is the sign of God's presence in us. Desire is not the craving of the moment, no. The Italian word, *desiderio*, comes from a very beautiful Latin term, this is curious: *de-sidus*, literally "the lack of the star". Desire is the lack of a lodestar, the lack of the reference point that orients the path of life; it evokes a suffering, a lack, and at the same time a tension to reach the good that we miss. Desire, then, is the compass to understand where I am and where I am going, or rather it is the compass to understand if I am still or if I am moving; a person who never desires is a person who is static, perhaps ill, almost dead. It is the compass to know if I am moving or if I am standing still. And how is it possible to recognize it?

Let us think, a sincere desire knows how to touch deeply the chords of our being, which is why it is not extinguished in the face of difficulties or setbacks. It is like when we are thirsty: if we do not find something to drink, we do not give up; on the contrary, the yearning increasingly occupies our thoughts and actions, until we become willing to make any sacrifice in order to quench it, almost obsessed. Obstacles and failures do not stifle the desire, no; on the contrary, they make it even more alive in us.

Unlike a momentary craving or emotion, desire lasts through time, even a long time, and tends to materialize. If, for example, a young person wishes to become a doctor, he or she will have to embark on a course of study and work that will occupy several years of his or her life, and consequently will have to set *limits*, say "no", to say "no", first of all to other courses of study, but also to possible diversions and distractions, especially during the most intense periods of study. However, the desire to give life a direction and to reach that goal – to become a doctor was the example – enables him or her to overcome these difficulties. Desire makes you strong, it makes you courageous, it makes you keep going forward, because you want to arrive at that: "I desire that".

In effect, a value becomes beautiful and more easily achievable when it is *attractive*. As some have said, "more important than being good is having the desire to become good". Being good is something attractive, we all want to be good, but do we have the wish to become good?

It is striking that Jesus, before performing a miracle, often questions the person about their desire: "Do you want to be healed?". And at times this question seems out of place, it is clear the person is sick! For example, when he meets the paralytic in the pool of Bethesda, who

had been there for many years and never managed to seize the right moment for getting into the water, Jesus asks him: "Do you want to be well?" (*Jn 5:6*). But how come? In reality, the paralytic's answer reveals a series of strange resistances to healing, which do not relate only to him. Jesus' question was an invitation to bring clarity to his heart, to welcome a possible leap forward: to no longer think of himself and his own life "as a paralytic", transported by others. But the man on the bed does not seem to be so convinced of this. *By engaging in dialogue with the Lord, we learn to understand what we truly want* from life. This paralytic is the typical example of those who say "Yes, yes, I want, I want, I want", but then "I don't want, I don't want, I don't want, I won't do anything". Wanting to do something becomes like an illusion and one does not take the step to do it. Those people who want and don't want. This is bad, and that sick man, there for thirty-eight years, but always grumbling; "No, you know, Lord, but you know when the waters move – that is the moment of the miracle – you know, someone stronger than me comes along, they enter, and I get there too late", and he complains and laments. But beware, because complaints are a poison, a poison to the soul, a poison to life, because they prevent the desire to go on from growing. Beware of complaints. When we complain in the family, married couples complain, one complains about the other, children about their father, priests about the bishop, or bishops about many other things... No, if you find yourself grumbling, beware, it is almost a sin, because stops desire from growing.

Often it is indeed desire that makes the difference between a successful, coherent and lasting project, and the thousands of wishes and good intentions with which, as they say, "hell is paved with": "Yes, I would like, I would like, I would like...", but you do nothing. The era in which we live seems to promote the maximum freedom of choice, but at the same time it *atrophies desire*, you want to be satisfied continually, which is mostly reduced to the desire of the moment. And we must be careful not to atrophy desire. We are bombarded by a thousand proposals, projects, possibilities, which risk distracting us and not permitting us to calmly evaluate what we really want. Many times, many times, we find people, think about young people for example, with their telephone in their hand, looking at it... "But do you stop to think?" – "No". Always turned outwards, towards the other. Desire cannot grow in this way, you live in the moment, satiated in the moment, and desire does not grow.

Many people suffer because they do not know what they want from their lives, many of them; they have probably never got in touch with their deepest desire, they have never known: "What do you want from your life?" – "I don't know". Hence the risk of passing one's existence between attempts and expedients of various kinds, never getting anywhere, and wasting precious opportunities. And so certain changes, though desired in theory, when the opportunity arises are never implemented, the strong desire to pursue something is lacking.

If the Lord were to ask us, today, for example, any one of us, the question he asked the blind man in Jericho: "What do you want me to do for you?" (*Mk 10:51*) – let us think that the Lord today asks each one of us this: "What do you want me to do for you?" – how would we answer? Perhaps we could finally ask him to help us know our deepest desire, that God himself has placed in our heart: "Lord, may I know my desires, may I be a woman, a man of great desires"; perhaps the Lord will give us the strength to make it come true. It is an immense grace, the basis of all the others: to allow the Lord, as in the Gospel, to work miracles for us: "Give us desire and make it grow, Lord".

Because he too has a great desire for us: to make us share in his fullness of life.

Thank you.