

## Distinguishing and Deciding

### Biblical Texts

- When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. Mt 16:3
- Test everything; hold fast to what is good. 1 Thess 5,21
- Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1:22

### Reflections

A few years ago, the German Diocese of Limburg made an interesting experiment. During the month of October, the Month of Mission, they received some representatives of the churches of the South. The diocese did not ask them to give talks in the parishes, as was customary, but simply to live in the parishes for four weeks and then relate their observations. What had struck them most? That the Christians here, when they meet in the various committees, **discuss a lot, but rarely pray**. For them it was a matter of course that as people of faith, for everything you plan and decide, you begin by asking God' for help.

This is also the greatest challenge of the synodal process, which Pope Francis considers a process of "discernment (of spirits)." We are good at analysing problems, discussing them and then making majority decisions. But are our decisions really what God wants for us, or not rather, what we want? How can we get a sense of what God wants for His church now?



A condition of a true discernment is that we go into the process with a **total openness** and without any preconceived ideas about what should come out in the end. This is a great spiritual challenge. Of course, all come with their own opinions, ideas and experiences that need to be expressed. But then I must not cling to them; I must let them go, hand them over as my humble contribution to the community, to receive the contributions of others with great openness and inner freedom. This freedom, not to want to assert myself, but to expect that from the different, sometimes contrary opinions, something new, something common, will grow, does not come by itself. It is a gift that we must ask for at the beginning of every exchange.

When we listen with an open mind and give space to the insights of others, different positions begin to emerge. We, then, need to expose them to the light of the gospel. After listening to one another, we need **to listen to God**. What is God saying to us through the word of the gospel? What would Jesus say? "What does the Spirit say to the churches?" And to our church today? Cf. Rev. 2ff

Let's give the Spirit of God a chance to make us feel, in long times of **silence and prayer**, what is right for building up the body of the church! Such a decision process needs time, patience and the trust that Jesus is with us when two or three are together in his name, in his spirit. And let us implement with courage and trust what we have identified as the right step. Synodality is like the process of baking a cake. Many ingredients go into the dough. Through kneading, they interact with each other. This is how something new is created: wholesome, delicious bread.

### Prayer of serenity

"God, grant me  
 the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;  
 the courage to change the things I can;  
 and the wisdom to know the difference.

Friedrich Christoph Oetinger^

### African Proverb

„Our faith, our mental image of anything, always needs an embodiment.  
 Chenjerai Hove „Hüter der Sonne“

