

11th Sunday after Trinity: Discernment
4 September 2011

Looking over my homily for Trinity 11 in *A Month of Sundays* (and, no, I'm not going to simply reread it to you this morning, thank you very much), I noticed that I delivered it originally on September 3, 2000, six days from my ordination to the priesthood. The intent for Trinity 13 is *discernment*, and my words then were "What a timely theme for this, my final reflection as a deacon, as I try to discern more clearly God's purpose for me as I move toward my ordination to the priesthood." Eleven years later, I find myself here saying, "What a timely theme for this, one of my last reflections as a priest, as I try to discern more clearly God's purpose for me as I move toward my consecration to the episcopacy." I said then that I would not cease to be a deacon, a *diakonos*, a "servant" simply because I became a priest, a *presbyteros*, an "elder" (and, no jokes, please, considering I am quite a bit elder than when I began, eh?) So will I not cease to be a deacon nor a priest when I become a bishop, an *episcopus*, an

“overseer.” However, the need for discernment could not be greater, for I will become an heir to the apostles themselves, a recipient of “the Spirit which is of God,” a guardian of the faith, someone at whose hands the free gift of God’s wisdom may be imparted such that “Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.”

My mother discerned that I was to be baptized when I was seven years old. Three years later I was able to discern for myself that I wanted to be confirmed. Through years of service as an acolyte in the Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration, I discerned a presence at the altar and determined I wanted to serve that presence just as I had seen Fr. Niles, who could say “Christ is Risen!” and, by God, you believed him! and Fr. Ketchum, who claimed angels helped him at the altar, and, by God, you believed him! As a young adult, I was introduced to Anglo-Catholicism by Fr. Homer Rogers at St. Francis Episcopal Church, and it was he who first heard me say, “I want to be a priest.” Expecting

profound words of wisdom to follow, imagine my surprise when he said, “You want to be a priest, eh? Well, then, you’d better be prepared to put up with a lot of shit!” In retrospect, of course, these were, indeed, words of wisdom, but they shocked my fifteen-year-old sensibilities senseless. Even so, I began going to confession, daily mass, continued serving at the altar. And so on and so forth.

My first rejection letter, so to speak, came after an interview with Bishop Robert Terwilliger, whose pithy grace I still use today—“May the Blessed One bless!”—and whose erudition and pastoral style I still admire. I discovered in the early 80s that there were, he said, too many Episcopal priests, more than could be placed in parishes, so I was encouraged to wait. And to discern. And so I did, but in myriad ways, for although Anglo-Catholicism remained the bedrock of my spiritual life, I journeyed eastward to Greek Orthodoxy, whose sumptuous liturgies and ancient traditions ravaged my soul. But then a life change (read: agnostic wife) led me to Unitarian-Universalism, whose rationalism and

pluralism made perfect sense to me at the time. But five years without the sacraments, I discovered my spirit was anorexic. So I found myself again with the Orthodox, for awhile, but then a life change occurred (read: present wife), and I rediscovered Liberal Catholicism, which I had encountered on paper many years prior. But now there was an actual parish meeting in Dallas. And the rest, as we say, is history. Or, more accurately, discernment.

I well know that each of you could relate your own tale of discernment, and I pray you continue “to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,” for it is always a process, not a product; a delving further, not an arrival. Let no one trick you by asking, “When were you saved?” as though asking when did you last floss. Discerning God’s will and growing into His likeness is the work of our lives as Christians. In every given moment, we are where we need to be if we would but stay conscious, stay focused, remain vigilant and discern Christ’s voice: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.