

A certain word that is often heard being kicked around in spiritual circles is the word “discernment.” A dozen or more years ago, and elderly priest once told me that if I didn’t want to answer a question ... that I should just say that I was discerning an answer. And the other person wouldn’t follow up.

It’s high-sounding, and because it’s 11-letters ... it must be something difficult to do.

Later on, in a class on St. Ignatius of Loyola, I got a much better answer: there are three “voices,” if you will, at work in any person ... and discernment is distinguishing these three.

The first, one would hope, is the voice of God. We hear in the reading from the Prophet Jeremiah:

*I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts;*

and,

*from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD ...*

Sounds pretty easy, right?

God’s in there - and we’ve got everything wrapped up nicely.

But in consideration of St. Ignatius on discernment, we’re looking at three so-called “voices.”

If the first is God, who are the other two?

One often sees in cartoons the angel on one shoulder and the devil on the other. And yes, another of the three “voices” is the devil - the tempter ... the “voice” that calls us to go against God’s law and against God’s will.

But then, who is the third?

Quite simply the third “voice” is our own voice.

There are many folks who claim to be the spokesperson for God. And if you peel back a layer or two, you start to notice that God sounds an awful lot like ... them!

On the other hand, there are many folks who blame everything on the devil - the catch-phrase from the 1970s “the devil made me do it” sums that view up.

Yet, if we're too wrapped up in our own wants and needs, the devil can sit on the sidelines while we ignore God's will and follow our own whims and desires.

Discernment is recognizing these three forces in our hearts, and drawing close to God, turning away from sin and temptation, and aligning our own will with the Will of God.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us pray that God's law - written on our hearts - will not be overshadowed by external temptations ... nor by our own internal machinations ... and that we might truly receive, embrace, and follow God's will - regardless of our own thoughts and desires.