



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE US SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Contemplation: Light and Courage

One of the central tenets of our Vincentian spirituality is trust in Divine Providence, which calls us to place God's will always above our own. St. Vincent went so far as to say that this alone was the way to sainthood, telling St. Louise, "*Oh, how little it takes to be very holy: to do the Will of God in all things.*" [CCD II:47] This leads us to an obvious question: *how can I know God's will?*

The reason that we, like Bl. Frédéric, struggle with this question is that we are aware of its great importance, not only in the works of the Society, but in our personal lives. Our process of discernment seeks not to simply find *an* answer, but to discover *the* answer; God's answer. As a young man, Frédéric struggled with his choice of vocations, feeling an obligation to his father's wish for him to be a lawyer, his own wish to pursue an academic career in letters, and the tug he felt in his heart towards the priesthood. At the same time, he was swayed by the encouragement of many people in his life to become a voice in defense of the church; a leader in its revival and growth.

Describing his discernment to a friend, Frédéric said he'd "*had a hard apprenticeship in a virtue which was unfamiliar to me—the abandonment of myself to the divine will.*" [182, to Lallier, 1838] So often, his plans seemed dashed, but rather than immerse himself in discouragement, he continually sought God's will in the people and events in his life, asking, in the wake of some early disappointments, "*might not that combination of circumstances be in itself a sign of the divine will?*" [Baubard, 80]

Discernment of God's will, then, is not a single event; a flash of insight that tells us every step to take for the rest of our lives. "*It is not enough to take a superficial glance;*" Frédéric explained. "*you need repeated reflection.*" [34, to Falconnet, 1831] We discover God's will most often in small glimpses, revealed in the events around us, and in the people who know us. Through our reflections – apostolic reflections – on our home visits and other works during our Conference meetings, we seek God's will, so that we can grow in the holiness that Vincent tells us is to be found in His will.

Finding God's will, if only for the moment, we then must "*go in simplicity where merciful Providence leads us, content to see the stone on which we should step without wanting to discover all at once and completely the windings of the road.*" [136, to Lallier, 1836] And this brings us to the second, and perhaps greater challenge of discerning God's will: acting on it.

The late General Norman Schwarzkopf once said that "*the fact of the matter is, you almost always know the right thing to do. The hard part is doing it.*" In a similar way, Bl. Frédéric's prayers to see God's will continued in a new way once he believed he understood it.

"*Up to the present I asked for light to know His will; I ask now for the courage to do it.*" [Baubard, 184]

Contemplate

Do I seek to discern His will in the people and events of my life?

Recommended Reading

[Apostolic Reflection with Rosalie Rendu](#)