Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Religious Life



"Abraham Contemplates the Stars," detail of a 1908 illustration by Ephraim Moses Lilien (Wikimedia Commons)



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In a world full of noise, distractions and constant choices, how do we know which path to take? Discernment is not simply choosing between good and evil; it is the spiritual ability to recognize God's will as it is revealed in everyday situations that invite us to conform ourselves to his truth. For those of us who have consecrated our lives to the Lord, discernment is not an administrative act to be applied when we want to resolve conflicts. It is a permanent state of listening, a mystical exercise where human freedom meets the divine will.

In the current context of consecrated life — often characterized by pastoral activism, an overload of responsibilities, anxiety, loneliness and vocational crises — taking the time to discern becomes a prophetic and irreplaceable necessity. In this process, the experience of Abraham, our father in the faith, can certainly help us. A man of God who is presented to us as the living archetype of the consecrated soul — one who learns to decipher God's whispers in the twilight of faith and who learns to obey with love.

Abraham learns that discernment means letting go of one's own certainties: "*Leave your country, your homeland, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you*" *(Genesis 12:1).*

He breaks radically with whatever binds his heart: ego, disordered attachments and the desire for control. The divine call bursts into the daily life of Ur and demands total detachment from everything that gave him identity and security.

For us today, this passage illuminates the first threshold of authentic discernment: the ability to let go. Our discernment does not flourish in the comfort of our own

certainties, in disordered attachments, or in a subtle clinging to pastoral structures that no longer communicate life but merely perpetuate routine. It flourishes when we open ourselves to the new — whether in the familiar or in the unknown — to decisions regarding apostolic work, a change of community, a new assignment offered to us, and bringing order to our lives, which are sometimes disordered because we are attached to what distances us from God.

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Discerning in the light of Abraham implies a constant exodus of the heart. God does not show Abraham the complete map or the detailed itinerary of the journey. He only points out the first step: leave your homeland.

In the same way, in community or personal life, the Lord often asks us to walk amid the uncertainty of day-to-day life, trusting solely that the one who called us at the beginning of our journey is faithful and will keep his promise. Discernment matures precisely there, out in the open, when we give up trying to control the future and allow ourselves to be guided by the gentle breeze of the Holy Spirit, knowing that the only true homeland of a consecrated heart is the Father's will.

Abraham learns that discernment is trusting in God's word, against all hope: "*Look up at the sky and count the stars — if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be*" *(Genesis 15:5).*

Abraham experiences firsthand the burden of old age and Sarah's barrenness. Human logic, common sense and the pragmatism of his time understandably led him toward resignation, complaint or the search for purely personal shortcuts.

Yet, in the silence of the night, God draws him out of the narrow confines of his tent and invites him to broaden his gaze, to lift his eyes and to look with the eyes of a dreamer toward the infinite. God invites him to enlarge the tent, to avoid remaining stuck in a life that is lost in routine and that abandons newness simply because it believes it has already achieved everything.

Abraham receives an invitation: to trust and to walk. There are no age limits for God. At any moment in our lives, we can experience this "going forth," this commitment to life in various ways.

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Many of our religious communities today may be experiencing the weight of spiritual "drought," the aging of structures and an apparent lack of apostolic fruitfulness on their missionary fronts. Discouragement and weariness can cloud our vision, causing us to see only how few of us there are and that vocations are not coming.

In this scenario, discernment means learning to look toward heaven when the earth seems barren. This is not a matter of naive or alienating optimism, but of the theological hope that allows us to remember the purpose of our vocation and mission.

Abraham learns that discernment means offering up his plans: "*Take your son, your only son, whom you love — Isaac ... and offer him there as a burnt offering*" *(Genesis 22:2).*

This biblical text focuses us on the theological and spiritual summit of Abrahamic discernment. Isaac was not merely a dearly beloved son; he was the physical embodiment of God's promise, the miracle granted after decades of waiting and pain. By asking him to offer Isaac up, God is purifying his servant's faith to the utmost.

The most subtle temptation in consecrated life is an idolatrous attachment to God's gifts. We often run the risk of falling head over heels in love with our ministries — educational works, hospitals, pastoral prestige, community projects — while forgetting the source that has called us.

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Deep and mature discernment demands a painful purification of our intentions. It involves being willing to place on the altar what we consider our greatest achievement — our personal or institutional "Isaac." When Abraham raises the knife, he demonstrates with painful clarity that he loves the giver more than the gift received.

Discernment reaches its fullness when we let go of control over our works and our projects and surrender them to the Lord, recognizing that the means come and go, but the covenant remains firm.

What is the Lord asking of us today? What must I let go of? What must I surrender?

Let us remember that discernment is not an isolated event that occurs only when making major decisions; it must become the continuous heartbeat of a life entirely surrendered — a life that seeks to be shaped and more deeply united with God, and that is wholly enamored with the search for what it is called to be.

We feel compelled to cultivate evangelical boldness in response to the call to walk in synodality, and this renewal demands that we abandon self-centeredness and the paralyzing fear of change. Discernment does not seek our self-realization, but rather the fulfillment of divine love within our own fragility.

We are invited to rediscover the freshness and prophetic strength that arise from feeling consecrated and as pilgrim communities, capable of walking with confidence through the night of faith, sustained solely by the absolute certainty of the Lord's pledged word.