

## **Donnybrook**

18 January 2022

### **Welcome**

I imagine I'm not the only one present who has made major mistakes in the past. In the face of critical decisions or assessments, in the heat of the moment I've got it truly wrong – but usually the distortion is visible only afterwards. My attachment to one way of seeing things or even my desire to get my own way simply hindered objectivity or even fairness. Only with the 20:20 vision of later hindsight could I see how distorted my way of seeing things was.

### **Topic**

Today's first reading provides a very different example of discernment.

### **Steps**

The ancient Israelites were looking for a replacement for Saul. Jesse had nine sons – with some marvellous names. In the ordinary course of things, the rule of primogeniture would apply: the eldest is the more important. As the story unfolds, eight of the sons are paraded and rejected by the prophet. The reason given is penetrating: *Humans look at appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.*

It is a mark of spiritual maturity to be able to set to one side my desires, my instincts and to be able to ask myself what is the good thing to do here? In a faith context, it means asking myself, what does God want of me, us, in this situation. In my experience, this decentering of self is good in small and great decisions and it is even good simply as part of our relationship with God. The technical term for this liberating objectivity is discernment.

Discernment will also be a key dimension of the synodal pathways. It would be tempting, easy and even enjoyable to insist on my own way. We are familiar with such approached in politics and in any situation of power and influence. But it would be a mistake. I may want many things, but the key is to ask what is God asking of his church at this historical moment?

### **Conclusion**

It is relatively unlikely that there is much history in our first reading today. There is instead a great deal about good discernment. Precisely because the Lord looks at the heart, we will need to see as God sees.