

Session 4: God will offer us guidance through other people.

I. Opening Prayer

The passages that will be prayerfully read as part of the opening prayer are the Scriptural foundation for this teaching.

- “For lack of guidance a people fails; safety lies in many advisers.”
(Proverbs 11:14)
- “God’s guidance will be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”
(2 Corinthians 13:1)

II. The TEACHING for Session 4: God will offer us guidance through other people.

Most people that we get to know are true gifts in our lives. We would not be the persons that we are without the friendship, love, encouragement and support that we receive from others.

It is wonderful that God also gives us guidance through other people, both from those that we know well and sometimes from those that we simply encounter in a situation. As part of God’s family, whether we are mindful of it happening or not, we serve as channels of God’s direction for each other. This can take place in a countless number of ways, such as the gentle touch of a lonely elderly person or even in an indirect way by overhearing two people talking at the grocery store.

It is a true blessing – and really a miracle – to recognize the movement of the Holy Spirit when we “run into” someone who tells us something we need to hear, or a through a “chance” encounter in which we see something that makes a difference in our lives. These unpredictable “miracles” are happening all the time but it is usually when we finally recognize that God is giving guidance in a certain situation, that we take notice. It seems that God provides these surprising encounters with other people to catch us off guard so that we realize it is not something we have control of or that we are making it happen. These are true gifts from our loving God.

A significant way that God desires to provide guidance to children and young people is by way of their parents. Relationships between parents and their sons and daughters are so important because parents have many responsibilities, but the most important is to lead their children to encounter Jesus Christ and develop a personal relationship with Him. In fact, parents receive children as gifts from God, with the primary obligation of helping them to become saints, who live forever in the perfect joy and peace of union with God in Heaven. This incredible obligation is and has been embraced by incalculable parents for thousands of years with self-giving love in cooperation with the help of God’s grace.

Therefore, the family is the most basic, as well as the most essential cell of society. We see this truth about the family in the relationship between parents and their children throughout the Bible as an expression of the love and guidance that God wishes to share with us. Jesus taught us to address God as Our Heavenly Father and to seek the answer to our needs and His direction in the “Our Father.”

Similarly, every mother and father have the opportunity to nurture within their children their relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, helping them to come to a place where they can nurture that relationship on their own. As Scripture says, “Train up a child in the way they should go and in their old age they will not depart from it.” *Proverbs 22:6*

Along with our family, we also need to be connected to a community of believers to receive guidance from God. A great way for this to happen is through attending Mass every Sunday. As we come together to worship God, we grow closer with the people in the parish family. Another fertile place to receive God’s guidance through other people is being involved in ongoing study and reflection with other Catholics, in a small group at the parish or in the home. Life gets busy and if we don’t make conscious efforts to stay connected, we can become isolated from the people of our parish family and other strong Christians. Further, even though technology can be a great connector in certain instances, it can also detract from the face-to-face communication and personal presence of other people whom God might want to use in a way that could not be experienced through social media. We don’t want to cut off a possible avenue of God’s guidance. Bonding with our parish community provides a real sense that we are a family united under the spiritual fatherhood of our pastor. Further, it develops strong friendships in Christ, strengthens us to discover others with whom we can “walk” on the journey of life and helps us to accept others and ourselves as imperfect persons who are seeking God’ guidance. These are reasons why participating at Mass each Sunday and joining a Bible or faith study group are necessary life-long components of the Christian life.

Our faith in God and our connection with the parish community need to be inseparably entwined. Although we do need to be committed to a personal relationship with Jesus in times of daily private prayer, the Holy Spirit markedly provides guidance with and through other people. Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20) to guide them on the right path.

In every age, there are men and women who intentionally seek to be saints of God. They desire to commit their lives completely to God, struggling day after day with the help of the Holy Spirit, to follow God’s good and perfect will by overcoming personal selfishness to serve others in a selfless way. These strong witnesses know with all their hearts that God is faithful and that He wants what is best for them, most especially to live forever with Him in Heaven. These holy men and women are models of what God desires for each one of us: to find peace, joy and fulfillment in loving God, ourselves and others and manifesting that love by serving others.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta is one such saint. She served the poorest of the poor, mostly the people abandoned to die of starvation on the streets of Calcutta, India. It seems unlikely that we would have ever heard of her. But the witness of the complete gift of herself to the call of God, to see the face of Christ in the suffering and dying and to serve them with respect, compassion and generosity moved the hearts of people worldwide.

Especially in this time period where greed, abuse and disrespect for the human person are prevalent, Mother Teresa's life seems to stand out most significantly. There are numerous books about her life which are well worth reading. We can learn from her life experiences how to imitate the love of Jesus for each person. As well, we can receive guidance from God, for instance, by reading a good biography of the life of Mother Teresa. It often occurs with such spiritual reading that the Lord will highlight a word or phrase or experience that helps give us clarity for our own personal circumstances.

Reading about saints such as Mother Teresa, Pope Saint John Paul II, Pier Giorgio Frassatti and Our Blessed Mother Mary can affect our lives in a dramatic way. The ultimate reason behind this is because they were committed disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' call to each one of us is to be a messenger of God to others, especially those in most need. Therefore, while we are looking and listening for the ways in which God may be giving us guidance through other people, it is essential to remember that God may be giving others guidance through us. To freely allow the Holy Spirit to work through us as messengers for others might be one of our most crucial responsibilities of a Catholic. And freely cooperating with the actions of the Holy Spirit to be of assistance to others will bring us great joy.

Recognizing that God gives us guidance through other people, it will be most beneficial to seek the counsel of godly, wise and experienced persons whom we know. These will include parents, pastors, teachers, and friends whom we deeply trust and respect for their integrity. Whether big or small decisions, it is of the utmost importance that we seek the counsel of others as we listen for God's guidance.

Sometimes without knowing of our discernment process, a person will come and voice some words that speak directly to our situation—our heart will "lift" and we will **know** it is a piece of guidance. It will become obvious that people, who are good listeners and pose insightful questions, are the ones who tend to be led by the Holy Spirit and speak their perception of His guidance when moved to do so. Be aware of persons who propose tons of advice and want to "fix" the situation.

One final thought about seeking the guidance of others: it is crucial to ask for advice from those who have various avenues of life experience but have a like-mindedness in the Christian faith. Further, this person should be one who would never shy away from telling you what you don't want to hear.

Discussion questions for small groups

Question 1. What stood out for you? or What resonated most with your personal situation currently? Why? Summarize below.

Question 2. In seeking God's' guidance, why is it necessary to consult with other persons whom you know and trust and are generally acknowledged by others as persons of integrity who are wise and live out their Christian commitment faithfully?

Question 3. Summarize in one or two sentences what your takeaway is from this section.

Question 4. If you were going to relate something from "God will offer us guidance through prayerfully reading the Bible" to your family tonight at the dinner table, what would you tell them? Would you

- 1) share the story with them or
- 2) mention something that was helpful to you from the teaching or
- 3) bring up something that resonated with you in connection with your own life experience?

III. A story from Scripture in which a person receives guidance from God through another person

Look up Acts 8:26-40 in their Bible.

Discussion Questions

Question 1. Summarize what is happening in the passage. Underline the place/places where the person received guidance. Briefly describe how the person received guidance from God through another person.

Question 2. What stood out for you? Why?

Question 3. Does this remind you of something or someone in your life?

Question 4. What word or phrase had special meaning for you from this passage?

IV. True, modern-day stories illustrating how God provided guidance through other people

Read one of the stories below, one written by a man and the other written by a woman, regarding their reception of God's guidance through other people. These stories reveal how the Holy Spirit still gives guidance through other people today. If time permits, it would be beneficial to read both stories.

Story 1

Here is a reflection of Mother Teresa by one person who was fortunate enough to have known her personally, in some small but significant way. He affirms that, despite fame and the scope of her accomplishments, Mother Teresa still managed to touch people directly; heart to heart. That seems to have been one of the signs of her greatness.

'Do Small Things With Great Love' by Vance Thurston

She'll probably never get the letter anyway, I reasoned. I had resisted the idea for three months. But I was home with the flu and the insistent urging wouldn't let up: Write to Mother Teresa.

Three years earlier, I had parked in front of a small gift store called the Serenity Shop and looked inside. The owner had been easy to visit with, and I had surprised myself by confiding in her that I was so wrapped up with work I didn't feel I was being much of service to God. She'd smiled, then recommended a video entitled *Mother Teresa*.

Back home, I found myself drawn into scenes of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity feeding starving children and caring for the sick and dying. A service was shown in an ancient church, where a young Indian novice in a blue-and-white sari stepped up to the altar. With quiet resolve she said, "I, Sister Mary, vow for life, chastity, poverty, obedience and wholehearted and free service to the poorest of the poor." The intensity of my feelings took me by surprise.

I had viewed the tape many times since, and could no longer ignore my urge to write. I told Mother Teresa how much her work moved me, and said that I had been many things – ranch hand, mechanic, carpenter and songwriter, but I wondered how I could serve God better.

When I recovered from the flu I took the letter to the post office. I had second thoughts as the clerk examined the incomplete address. "Let's go ahead and send this," he said. "I'm sure in Calcutta they know where Mother Teresa lives."

Spring came and went. Occasionally I wondered if Mother Teresa got my letter. Though I nurtured a secret hope she would write back, I knew Mother Teresa had bigger concerns than a carpenter in Montana.

In early August a simple envelope postmarked “Calcutta” arrived in the mail. I carefully opened the letter, took a deep breath and unfolded the sheet of rough paper. The words appeared to have been typed by an ancient typewriter. After a few kind personal references to my letter, she wrote, “Whatever you do – whether to carve a door or write a song that God inspires you to write – do it all for His glory and the good of His people. Always do small things with great love, and be ready to take whatever He gives and give whatever He takes with a big smile. Let us pray.” The letter was signed in blue ink, “God bless you, Mother Teresa.”

Do small things with great love. What could have been a better demonstration of that belief than her letter? I had asked what I could do to serve God better and she had shown me.

Four weeks later I watched Mother Teresa’s funeral on television. She had not tried to do great things. She did small things with such great love that it touched the hearts of millions. The gift of her letter might have seemed a small thing to Mother Teresa, but the love she shared has changed my life.

From How to Listen to God by Doug Hill, page 65 . Used with permission

Story 2 ***How do I know if this is the right decision?*** ***By Ann Lankford***

Small towns are great places to live. This was one of the reasons that I moved to Schulyer, Nebraska after completing a master’s degree in Catechetics and Christian Ministry at Franciscan University of Steubenville. The position was to direct the Faith Formation Program for two Catholic Parishes. Interestingly enough, the two beautiful Churches were three blocks apart. We had over 500 youth who participated and most were either farm kids or Hispanics.

I greatly enjoyed working with the two priests and all the families from the area. Another great perk was that I developed one of the best friendships of my life. Jill was married to a local doctor and I got to know her when she and her husband attended the RCIA process, which I directed. The RCIA is a process of conversion which helps people to enter into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ through committed daily prayer and study for preparation to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church. Jill’s husband was Catholic and she was Lutheran and they were raising their children in the Catholic Faith. Jill wanted to learn more about the depth of prayer in the Catholic Church and come to understand what her children were being taught about faith in Jesus Christ. Jill greatly appreciated the RCIA process and how her relationship with Our Lord was deepening as she became more committed to prayer. She and her husband began praying together and praying with their children on a daily basis, which brought a great deal of forgiveness, healing and more peace in their marriage.

A few months after Jill entered the Church at Easter, she gave birth to their fourth child.

Several months later, to the shock of the entire town, her husband collapsed on the tread mill and died instantly as he was working out in the lower level of their home. One of the priests that I worked for came up after morning Mass and told me. He said that I needed to be with Jill at this time. This was difficult for me as my grandparents had died when I was very young and so an up close experience with death was foreign and carried a lot of fear for me, even as an adult. It was only in response to the priest, whom I greatly respected, that I went to Jill's house.

When I greeted her, Jill started talking about the RCIA process and, all I could think about was, *your husband just died and you are thinking about RCIA?* Jill purposely stated that God knew this was going to happen and He drew her to the RCIA process so that she could really learn to pray and grow in her trust of Jesus for this difficult time. The more she talked, the more I cried.

At the funeral, Jill kept asking what she and the children should do, as this was the first Catholic funeral she had attended. After the luncheon, as Jill and her children were leaving, God put something on my heart. I told Jill that, when she was ready, I would come once a week to watch the children so that she could spend a Holy Hour with Jesus in adoration. In the back of my mind, even though the words were coming out of my mouth, I figured that I would never hear from her. Interestingly enough, she called me two weeks later.

I started watching her three girls and one boy the next Friday. Since Jill was dealing with grief, I became very close to the children and I think that the tiny baby thought that I was her mother. After a few months, Jill said that the two of us needed to start going out to dinner after she prayed her Holy Hour. This was the beginning of our deep friendship. Over the next two years, I was pretty much with Jill and her four children just about every weekend. Jill spoke about Jim's death quite freely and all the ways that God supported her through the traumatic days and months. Not only were these discussions about death beneficial, but her sharing her family with me became a great blessing. These two components were what established this as a life-long friendship.

During my fourth year in Schuyler, it seemed like there was a nudge from God that it was time for me to move on. However, as I pursued various positions, it seemed that doors kept closing on me. I related the situation to a priest and then said I would stay and coast this next year. Father Whelan said, "Do you really think God wants you to coast?" At that point, I simply said to God in prayer; "If you want me to leave, then help me to know how to move forward."

The best time to leave would have been over the summer, so that a new person would have the time to organize the Program for the next year. However, in the early fall, a situation opened up in which my sister heard from then Bishop Burke of the Diocese of La Crosse about an open position. I called soon thereafter and went for the interview. Everything went well and I really liked the City of La Crosse. However, after returning to Schuyler, I started doubting, primarily because I understood it can be difficult and takes time to establish good and lasting friendships.

In feeling unsettled with the idea of staying in Schuyler and being uncomfortable with the idea of moving to La Crosse, I prayed and asked Jesus to give me a sign about this decision; and I had some qualifiers. If the Lord wanted me to go to La Crosse, then I needed a sign that there would be a woman that would be a good friend and who would share her family with me. A few days later, I received a phone call from Chris Stefanick who was driving on the freeway in Los Angeles. I had been in school at the same time with he and his wife, Natalie, four years prior and she had become a friend as we were part of the RCIA process on campus. Chris said that he had just accepted a position in La Crosse and heard that I had interviewed there also. I told him that I had cold feet about accepting the position. But when I asked how many children they had, his reply really caught me off guard. Natalie had just given birth to their third child. This phone call felt like an answer to my prayer. I moved forward in the process with an open heart, seeking additional guidance from God and, having received that, ultimately I accepted the position.

As of 2018, I am now in my 17th year of working for the Diocese of La Crosse. It has been a very good fit for me and yet not without difficulties and challenges. This whole experience keeps me depending heavily on the Lord, and in the process, gives me opportunities for personal growth. I do periodically think back to God's guidance to accept this position – remembering the deep experience of peace that God gave me at that time of decision-making. This reminds me that I am where God wants me now, and that He will continually equip me to do the work.

Discussion questions

Question 1: Underline the place/places where the person received guidance. Briefly describe how the person received guidance from God through another person.

Question 2: How did this story affect you?

Question 3: Do one or both of these stories or anything about them remind you of something in your own life?

Question 4: Did you find one or both of the stories consoling, challenging, comforting? Why?

Question 5: In reflecting on one of these true, modern-day stories, what is the take-away for you?

V. Closing Prayer: The 12th Grade Prayer Card

Using the "Seeking God's Guidance" Prayer Card, pray the front side.