

Session 5: God will offer us guidance through angels.

I. Opening Prayer

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

- “See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since My Name is in him. If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you, guiding you...” (Exodus 23:20-23)
- “He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.” (Psalm 91:11)
- And Peter said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod ...” (Acts 12:11)

II. The TEACHING for Session 5: God will offer us guidance through angels.

In our culture, we tend to think of angels as little decorative cherub ornaments. Further, there is an incorrect understanding that when people die they become angels.

Based upon historical events in the Bible and our Catholic Tradition handed down from the Apostles, the Church teaches that we are surrounded by the watchful care and intercession of angels. Angels glorify God without ceasing and “serve His saving plans for other creatures: The angels work together for the benefit of us all.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* – hereafter CCC, paragraph 350)

Angels are spiritual beings without bodies. Even though angels do not have bodies, they are persons. Angels are servants and messengers of God. “Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.” (CCC 336)

How often do we stop to think about the gift of God’s angels and how they serve us? It may not have occurred to us that angels, in their role as messengers of God, also serve us as teachers. Providing guidance in knowing God’s will for a particular situation probably doesn’t stand out in our thinking as the work of angels.

We need to grow in our awareness that throughout the history of our salvation angels have been present. This history of our salvation reveals all that God has done for us to bring us back into union with Himself since the loss of that union through the Original Sin. God desires nothing more than that we receive His boundless love and be saved by Him. Angels, as God messengers, have announced His ongoing saving action from far or near and have served and continue to serve the accomplishment of God’s plan. (See CCC 332)

This Scriptures passage about angels encourages us to attentiveness: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2) We should take some time to think back and remember any situations in our lives where we possibly encountered an angel(s). There is a good deal of historically-based passages in the Scriptures involving the work of angels:

They closed the earthly paradise; protected Lot; saved Hagar and her child; stayed Abraham’s hand; communicated the law by their ministry; led the People of God; announced births and callings; and assisted the prophets, just to cite a few examples. Finally, the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Precursor (John the Baptist) and that of Jesus Himself. (CCC 332)

From the Incarnation to the Ascension, the life of the Word Incarnate is surrounded by the adoration and service of angels. When God ‘brings the firstborn [Christ] into the world, He says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship Him.’ Their song of praise at the birth of Christ has not ceased resounding in the Church’s praise: ‘Glory to God in the highest!’ They protect Jesus in His infancy, serve Him in the desert, strengthen Him in His agony in the garden, when He could have been saved by them from the hands of His enemies as Israel had been. Again it is the angels who ‘evangelize’ by proclaiming the Good News of Christ’s Incarnation and Resurrection. They will be present at Christ’s return, which they will announce, to serve at His judgment. (CCC 333)

It is helpful to step back and acknowledge that there are good angels and bad angels and how all this came about. The fallen angels tempt us to reject and hate God. The *Catechism* in paragraphs 391-393 explains:

Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. (Genesis 3:1-5; Wisdom 2:24) Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil". (John 8:44; Revelation 12:9) The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: "The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing."

Scripture speaks of a sin of these angels. (2 Peter 2:4) This "fall" consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably rejected God and His reign. We find a reflection of that rebellion in the tempter's words to our first parents: "You will be *like* God." (Genesis 3:5) The devil "has sinned from the beginning"; he is "a liar and the father of lies". (1John 3:8; John 8:44)

It is the irrevocable character of their choice, and not a defect in the infinite divine mercy that makes the angels' sin unforgivable. "There is no repentance for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death." (CCC 391-393)

The reason the Son of God appeared and was crucified and then rose from the dead was to destroy the works of this devil [and the other fallen angels]. (1John 3:8)

Scripture witnesses to the disastrous influence of the one Jesus calls "a murderer from the beginning," – [that is Lucifer the fallen angel, also known as Satan the devil, the enemy] – who would even try to divert Jesus from the mission received from His Father [of saving us]. (CCC 394; John 8:44; Matthew 4:1-11)

The enemy's goal is to seduce us and draw us away from God and ultimately away from the eternal destiny that Christ has purchased for us, that is, to be with Him in unconditional love for all eternity. We are engaged in this continuous battle for our souls, with the help of God's grace and through the guidance and assistance He provides us through His holy angels for this purpose.

The power of Satan is, nonetheless, **not** infinite. He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God's reign. Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and although his action may cause grave injuries – of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature – to each man and to society, the action is permitted by divine providence, which with strength and gentleness, guides human and cosmic history. It is a great mystery that providence should permit diabolical activity, but "we know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him." (Romans 8:28; CCC 395)

God desires only what is good for us and strengthens us in our times of need with His abundant grace, sometimes through messages from an angel. In the Gospel of Luke, we see in the Infancy Narratives how God guided Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds through the words of an angel. In each of the appearances of an angel to Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds, the angel included the words "Do not be afraid."

It is important to note that angels appear often in the Scriptures to guard and guide persons. Other Scripture passages that reveal how God guided individuals through an angel are:

- An angel stayed Abraham's hand in the sacrifice of Isaac. (Genesis 22:1-19)
- The archangel Raphael revealed his identity to Tobit and his son Tobiah: "I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who enter and serve before the Glory of the Lord." (Tobit 12:15) As God's messenger, in answer to the prayer of Tobit and his wife, Raphael healed Tobit's eyes of the cataracts, traveled with Tobiah so that he could marry Sarah and drove out the wicked demon from her.
- Daniel prayed and there seemed to be no answer. On the 30th day an angel appeared and said, "Your prayer was answered on the first day but I was stopped by the evil prince of Persia." Michael the Archangel came to stop the demon so that this angel could get through. (Scripture 10:12)

- The angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah that Elizabeth would conceive a child in her old age. (Luke 1:5-25)
- An angel appears to Cornelius and tells him to summon Peter to come to his home and teach him about God. (Acts 10:1-48)
- An angel appears to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary at the tomb announcing the Resurrection of Jesus. (Matthew 28: 1-10)

“From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by the watchful care and intercession of angels. Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life. Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 336). Let us receive the help of these angels whom God has assigned to us.

A good way to keep an awareness of the reality of the presence of our Guardian Angel as well as the multitude of angels in our lives is to think of and pray the “Angel of God” prayer often. We are reminded in the “Angel of God” prayer that we can ask for their guidance, light and intervention.

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 learn more about angels and become more aware of your Guardian Angel who was given to you by God and is with you to guard and guide you on your path to Heaven.

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 angels” 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 God gave a person guidance through the message of an angel.

Look up Acts 12: 5-11 in the Bible.

Question 1. Summarize in 4-5 sentences what is happening in this Scripture passage.

Question 2. When and how did Peter receive guidance from the angel?

Question 3. What stood out for you? Why?

Question 4. Does this remind you of something or someone in your life?

Question 5. What word or phrase “leapt off the page” from this passage or had special meaning for you?

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

Story 1

The following story by Elizabeth Sherrill tells of a healing experience by Brother Andrew, a Dutchman who spent much of his life smuggling Bibles behind the Iron Curtain. Despite all the good he had done, Brother Andrew couldn't shake the shame he felt for having been among the Dutch soldiers sent to fight the people in Indonesia. It took an encounter with an angel to free him from that burden.

'A Hand of Forgiveness'

By Elizabeth Sherrill about Brother Andrew

When the Cold War ended, Brother Andrew decided to return to now-independent Indonesia to assist the people he had once fought. Nothing he did for them, however, served to ease his conscience. The place he most dreaded revisiting was the town of Ungaran, where he army unit had been headquartered.

“At last,” he said, “I forced myself to go back there.” He made himself walk up the single main road, past the mosque, to the big U-shaped school building the Dutch had used as a barracks. The building had been turned back into a school; on the former drill ground inside the U, some children in ragged clothing were playing.

As Andrew stood watching, a little girl, maybe eight years old, suddenly broke away from her playmates and ran toward me. The other children stopped their game and stared after her, clearly puzzled. The child ran straight up to Andrew, put her small hand in his, looked up into his eyes and smiled. Then she ran back to join her companions.

Andrew stood where he was, tears running down his face. “I knew Who it was Who’d come to me. It was Jesus. Jesus telling me, ‘I forgive you, Andrew. Now forgive yourself and serve these beautiful people with joy.’”

From How to Listen to God by Doug Hill, pages 83-84. Used with permission

Story 2

‘Only For Me’ by Lindsay Thomas

Like most high school juniors, I couldn’t wait to be a senior. Early in the year I was already daydreaming about the big prom and our graduation. But it wasn’t long before I had to wake up from my dream. In the spring of junior year I got pregnant.

My boyfriend and I were just too young to make our relationship work. We finally broke up. Problem was, I didn’t have anyone else to talk to about this. I was afraid of what my parents might say. Even my friends. So I kept it to myself. Somehow I kept the pregnancy secret. I gained weight, but I was athletic and I carried it well. I wore sweatpants and oversized T-shirts. Nobody noticed my growing belly. And nobody noticed that I was crumbling inside.

In September, before school started, Mom wanted to take me shopping at the mall. “You’re going to need some special outfits for senior year,” she said.

“Okay, Mom,” I muttered. “Whatever.” My total lack of excitement gave everything away.

“Lindsey?” she said. “What’s wrong?”

My secret tumbled out. It was such a relief. “I’m six months pregnant,” I confessed.

“All this time,” Mom said, “and you’ve held it all in.”

I was so ashamed, I just wanted to hide. Even from God. “I want to go someplace where no one knows me,” I said.

Mom understood and found a home for single mothers in a city a couple of hours away. The facility was next to a hospital. I could stay there, have my baby and arrange for an adoption. I could continue my education.

The staff at the maternity home was nice enough, but being with so many other pregnant teens just made me feel worse. Each of us lived with another girl, and we shared a bath with our neighbors. The shower stall was so small you couldn’t turn without bumping your belly. We could sign out and go into town if we wanted—see a movie, get our nails done, that kind of stuff. But I threw myself into schoolwork. This was far from my dream of senior year. No prom. No dates. No graduation ceremony.

I was cordial to the other girls, but I didn't really want to make friends. I couldn't wait for weekends, when Mom came to get me and we returned to Burlington. "It's so good to be home," I said, hugging her every chance I got. But Sunday night always came, and all too soon I was back in my lonely room.

There were counseling sessions every couple of days, and we talked a lot about self-image. I knew what I thought of myself, and it wasn't good. What must God think of me? I wondered.

One day I saw a notice on the bulletin board. "Bible Study," it read. I'd loved Bible stories and church camp as a kid, but I kind of put my faith on the back burner once I hit high school. I worried what my friends would think if I acted too religious. Here, who cared? I wrote my name at the top of the sheet, the first one to sign up. The meetings would be held on Wednesdays at four o'clock in a conference room.

That first Wednesday, I opened the door, feeling kind of shy. Choir music played in the background. When I saw the teacher, I relaxed a little. She was a beautiful black woman, maybe in her forties, and her face seemed to glow. "I'm Dorothy," she said, "and it looks like you have me all to yourself. Welcome."

Welcome was how I felt each Wednesday when I spent an hour with Dorothy. None of the other girls ever came to the class. It was always just Dorothy and me. She seemed to sense exactly what was on my mind on any given day. One afternoon she took my hand. "You're afraid, aren't you?" she said. I nodded. I was afraid of what I'd done, afraid of giving birth, afraid of what my friends would say if they ever found out. I didn't know how to face life anymore.

Dorothy opened her Bible, and started reading from Philippians 4. "Do not be anxious," she read. "The God of peace will be with you."

"I'd like to believe that," I said. Dorothy traced her finger down the page. "Remember this," she said, pointing to Philippians 4:13. "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."

In our sessions we talked and laughed and cried, and I learned why Dorothy had that glow about her. "I love the Lord," she said. Right before Thanksgiving she gave me a book of Scripture passages called *God's Promises*. "If you have questions and I'm not here," she said, "you can find answers in this book." Then she put her arms around me. "Your baby will be beautiful." That was the last time I saw her.

My November 27 due date came and went, and by December I wasn't doing well. God of peace, be with me, I prayed. The doctors induced labor when I was a good two weeks overdue. My newborn son was beautiful, just like Dorothy said. Saying good-bye to him seemed impossible, but I was thankful for the loving family who adopted him. Over and over I asked

God to give me strength. I had to keep reminding myself that I'd done what was best for my baby.

I returned home a few days before Christmas. Somehow I got through the next several months. I read and reread *God's Promises*. It wasn't easy to think about the past, but I often thought about Dorothy. I told Mom how important she'd been to me.

Eventually I called the maternity home to get Dorothy's telephone number and address. I couldn't believe what I was told. The nurse who answered said that there was no Dorothy at the home. And no one had ever conducted a Bible study there. After I hung up the phone, I could barely speak. "Dorothy must have been there only for me," I said to Mom. We talked about it and decided God had sent an angel to show me that He loved me, no matter what.

My son is now seven, and with the blessings of his adoptive parents, we talk almost every day. I'm married now, and my husband and I have a child of our own. Glancing through a book of baby names, I decided to look up Dorothy. I guess I shouldn't be surprised. Her name means "Gift of God."

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Discussion questions

Question 1: Underline the place/places *where* the persons received guidance. Briefly describe *how* the persons received guidance from God through an angel.

Question 2: How did these stories affect you?

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

Question 4: Did you find these stories consoling, challenging, comforting? Why?

Question 5: In reflecting on 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.