

## Session 6: God will offer us guidance in our hearts.

### I. Opening Prayer

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

- “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” Proverbs 3:5-6
- “You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart” Psalm 51: 6
- “O that today you would hearken to His voice! Harden not your hearts.” Psalm 95-7-8
- “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7 (Note: peace in your heart is one clear sign that God is leading you.)

### II. The TEACHING for Session 6: God will offer us guidance in our heart.

In developing and deepening our relationship with Christ, we need to learn about Him through study by using our gift of reason (with our minds). When we desire to deepen our friendship with Jesus and His Church, we think more seriously about the questions of life: how all this fits together and how it affects our lives. And this study and reflection is essential. We also need to encounter the Person of Christ in our hearts. It is during these encounters that the relationship with Our Lord grows and matures; we are then convinced that Jesus is real: a living, breathing Divine Person. In the depths of our heart, we come to know Our Lord better, recognize how much He loves each one of us personally, and this leads to a genuine trust in Him.

It is helpful at this point to clarify the use of the word heart. In our Catholic Tradition, the meaning of the word “heart” can be explained as follows:

The heart is the deepest center of our being, beyond the grasp of our reason; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the center of our will, the place where decisions are made. It is the place of truth; it is the deepest place of encounter in our relationship with God. (The wording of this paragraph was adapted from the *Catechism*, paragraph 2563)

In our culture today, when people use the word “heart,” the meaning is used interchangeably with emotions, also referred to as feelings, and/or intuition. And for the most



part, that is the way the word “heart” will be used in this segment. However, we will never leave aside what has just been expressed regarding the definition of “heart” based upon the *Catechism*. Therefore, in this session we will always call attention to situations where emotions, also referred to as feelings, and/or intuition might actually stand in the way of the deeper meaning of “heart” and be a hindrance to this deeper truth.

In the heart – in this place of encounter — we receive guidance from God. Have you ever experienced moving in a different direction than what people advised you because it didn’t seem right? Have you ever felt that you could not trust someone in a situation? These feelings can be prompts from the Holy Spirit who desires to guide us in the right direction. Learning to recognize these promptings in our hearts through frequent times of prayer requires lots of practice. This perseverance in practice will gradually lead, in an ongoing way, to increasing confidence that we will know when to trust these emotions, feelings and/or intuitions. Will we make mistakes? Yes, of course. However, God knows our hearts and will use everything, even our mistakes, to lead us and guide us.

It is essential to note that our gift of reason – our thinking process – and the movements and feelings in our heart are not at odds. God gave us both head and heart to complement each other– as a type of checks and balances. The Holy Spirit will use both our mind and heart to guide us. It is important to note that we can’t trust feelings all the time due to the effects of Original Sin. Our feelings need to be submitted to a mature thinking process, a properly formed conscience and the wise guidance of spiritually mature adults, as we can be “swayed” by feelings of selfishness, or envy or anger, for example.

St. Teresa of Avila, a Doctor of the Church, explains in her writings regarding personal prayer how God speaks to our hearts, giving us clues that can guide us along the path He would have us follow as treated in *Conversation with Christ* by Peter Thomas Rohrbach.

...St. Teresa insists that we talk to God directly during our time of prayer. [She describes this time of prayer], this meditation, as a *conversation*. And conversation, in the ordinary acceptance of the word, implies a mutual exchange of words and sentiments. Does Christ respond to our conversation? Does *He* converse with us in prayer? St. Teresa assures us that He most definitely does: meditation is not a monologue, but rather a dialogue. A few texts from the writings of St. Teresa will serve to present a sampling of this fundamental Teresian doctrine:

Do you suppose that because we cannot hear Him, He is silent? He speaks clearly to the heart when we beg Him from our heart to do so.

Soon after we have begun to force ourselves to remain near the Lord, He will give us indications that . . . He heard us . . .

. . . We must be glad that there is no need to raise our voices in order to speak to Him since His Majesty will make us conscious that He is there.



St. Teresa does not intend to infer that this communication from Christ implies any supernatural vision or revelation. Christ speaks to our souls in simple, ordinary ways; and He speaks to all souls to pray to Him – not only to those in the higher regions of the spiritual life. A modern commentator on St. Teresa lucidly describes the manner in which Christ addresses us during meditation:

St. Teresa teaches us that God does speak to us when we pour out our hearts to Him. We need not think, however, that God makes Himself heard in an audible manner. He answers us by sending us graces of light and love whereby we understand His ways better [this is His guidance for us] and burn with desire to embrace them generously. Listening, therefore, consists in accepting these graces and striving to profit by them.

Hence, if we speak to Christ, we may be consoled that He will speak to us in return. This is why it has been suggested that during prayer, it is well to vary our verbal conversation directed to Christ with periods of silence, during which we can listen to Him and offer Him our receptivity. We speak to Christ; He speaks to us – we could expect no less of our Divine Friend. (*Conversation with Christ* by Peter Thomas Rohrbach, p. 52-53)

It is a fact that God offers us His guidance in our hearts, inviting us to follow His movements of interior light and peace, showing us the best path to go. We must keep in mind that the devil, “a murderer from the beginning... and the father of lies” (John 8:44) also seeks to give us direction – the wrong guidance.

How are we able to know where the guidance is coming from that we receive in our hearts? Spiritual discernment – seeking to discover God’s guidance and His will – needs to be a key factor in our lives, mainly because of our fallen human natures. We can deceive ourselves so easily. We have inherited this strong inclination toward self-deception since the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve.

There is a helpful Scripture passage for discerning whether it is God’s guidance or the devil’s which is found the fifth chapter of Galatians. St. Paul lists what is the outward display of sin in the heart: “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, bickering, jealousy, anger, outbursts of rage, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness and carousing.” (19- 21) Such sinful behavior indicates any guidance that manifests in this way has come from the enemy.

In contrast, when we see the fruit of the Spirit being manifest, which is “love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, and chastity” then we know that the guidance has come from the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5: 22-23) Our resulting thoughts, words and deeds in any given situation are a sure way of knowing the origin of this guidance. “By their fruits, you will know them.” (Matthew 7:16)



The essence of Paul's words as referred to in the fifth chapter of Galatians, mentioned above, is that the feelings and urgings of our hearts will play out with different results depending on their source. Therefore, we always want to carefully examine those feelings and think through what the results will probably look like. Sure, there may be situations when we follow God's guidance and yet we will still face bickering, dissensions and even anger from others. There will always be people who disagree. That is why we want to discern properly, (seeking to discover God's guidance and His will) so that we are as sure as possible that we are hearing from God. Spiritual discernment includes such things as ongoing prayer, waiting with patience on the Lord to confirm the guidance, and spiritual direction with a competent, wise, trained, mature spiritual person. Such spiritual guidance may be sought in the Sacrament of Confession. A good rule to follow is that intuitions and feelings are less a call to move forward, but rather an invitation to further *examination*. It is important to realize that guidance from God doesn't weaken when it is *examined*; it becomes stronger with greater clarity.

### **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.** Define spiritual discernment as described above. (See last paragraph on page 3)

**Question 3.** Circle the following words that would indicate that God is guiding a person in this particular area. Note that the words that are not circled would indicate that the 'enemy' is guiding a person in this particular area.

love	fornication	bickering	joy	peace
patient endurance	impurity	jealousy,	anger	
selfish rivalries	kindness	chastity		
drunkenness and carousing	generosity			

**Question 4.** Summarize in one or two sentences what your takeaway is from this section.

**Question 5.** 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 St. Paul guidance in his heart.

Look up and read Acts 15:35 – 41 and 16:1-3 and 2 Timothy 4:11 in their Bible.

**Question 1.** Summarize what is happening in this Scripture passage.

**Question 2.** What guidance did St. Paul receive from God regarding Mark?

**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 from this passage had special meaning for you?

### IV. A true, modern-day story illustrating how God provided guidance in a person's heart

One story has been provided. This story reveals how the Holy Spirit still gives guidance in answer to personal prayer. Discussion questions follows the story.

#### **Story One**                    ***'Failure Was Not On The Menu' by Jonathan Byrd.***

My whole dream seemed to come crashing down one hot August evening four years ago as I slumped, dejected, at an old picnic table in the middle of the construction site. Dark steel structural girders loomed over me, seeming to overshadow any hopes I had for making a go of the cafeteria I was building.

I had been in the restaurant business most of my life, and for years I had dreamed of building the best cafeteria in the world. Yet now many people were predicting it would fail.

Why? Because I did not plan to put alcohol on the menu.

It wasn't that I had anything against other restaurants doing this; *I simply felt God didn't want me to do it.* One evening long ago when I was eighteen, I made a church call with our minister on the grieving kin of a whole family who had been killed outright. Their car had been struck head-on by a drunk driver. In the silence of that sad living room, I knew that all the money in the world wasn't worth being in any way responsible for such a tragedy.

But a lot of knowledgeable people had a different view.



“Jonathan,” advised a business friend, “here you’re planning a restaurant with big function rooms for weddings, banquets and other celebrations. If you won’t serve liquor, why, you’re writing your own ticket for bankruptcy.”

When I explained that I felt the banquet rooms would be used by church groups, he snickered. “You probably won’t make enough off them to pay your light bill.”

“Well,” I said, “I guess I’ll have to leave that in God’s hands.”

God hadn’t failed me in my thirty-six years. But that didn’t mean life had been easy. Mom and Dad weren’t well off, and to help make ends meet I started working as a youngster selling a skin salve door-to-door. Next I sold tomatoes, then raised sheep, and by the time I was nine I had a thousand dollars in the bank.

Meanwhile Dad and Granddad had started a small ice-cream stand on U.S. 31 in Greenwood, just south of Indianapolis. Eventually it grew into the Kitchen Drive-In, and soon I was flipping burgers, making shakes and greeting customers.

I loved the restaurant business. It touched me to see folks enjoying good food the way I did. Mom said I had a big hole in my stomach that no amount of food could fill. Still, back then I was so skinny I had to wear suspenders to keep my pants up.

I was impressed by how many significant biblical events involved people eating together: Jesus feeding the five thousand; His grilling fish on the beach for the disciples; and the most intimate gathering of all, those awed men sitting down to a meal on the eve of Jesus’ crucifixion.

The summer I was fifteen, Dad became ill, and I took over the responsibility of our restaurant and its sixty-some employees. I worked eighty hours a week, convinced this was my calling in life. Dad eventually retired and I went on to Cornell University’s School of Hotel Administration. I got a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise and through the years expanded that into seven KFC restaurants. All the while my dream of opening a cafeteria was growing.

Why a cafeteria? When we were kids my folks often took us to a local cafeteria after church. I loved being able to pick out just what I wanted from the foods displayed before me. Even my little sister Janeen, a finicky eater, always found something she liked.

[Later on], the dream became more persistent as it took shape in my mind. I wanted to serve delicious food with the greatest selection possible at economical prices. For quality assurance I planned on modern kitchens with computer-controlled menus, which had never been tried in a restaurant before, only in hospitals and institutions. Since I wanted to offer at least two hundred items each day, I figured the cafeteria line would be almost a third as long as a football field. I began to see I was thinking about what could well be the world’s largest cafeteria.

But would there be enough customers? Jesus told a parable advising that a man who builds a tower should count the cost so he knows he can finish the job (Luke 14:28-30). I had done my homework. Indianapolis was a fast-growing city, and I had picked out a good location near one of America’s major crossroads – just off Interstate 65 in Greenwood – where we would serve not only the local community but also many travelers passing through.



After a lot of prayer, I burned my bridges by selling the Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants. On March 1, in a dedication service, we turned our first spadeful of dirt on what would be a colonial-style building covering one acre of ground.

But from then on, it seemed every worldly thing set out to stop us. We figured on spending twenty-five thousand dollars for permits; they ended up costing ten times that. Then we had to truck a huge load of dirt off the site to bring it to proper grade. This cost another eighty-six thousand dollars. The contractor advised me to cut back on the quality of materials, such as the raw oak trim throughout the vast dining room.

“No,” I said, “I’m putting my name on this place. My wife, two boys and I are going to eat here along with, I hope, a lot of other people. I want it to be right.”

The concrete was poured, the structural steel erected, and the walls started going up. But a big storm hit us in July and blew down most of the roof trusses.

Then, in August, came the worst day of all.

My pastor showed up at the work site and passed on a prediction from a fellow church member who was in the restaurant food-distribution business. “He is terribly worried about you, Jonathan, and so am I,” he said. “He says you’ll go broke in six months, and I thought I’d better come down and warn you.” My pastor felt the same way I did about liquor, but he was also sincerely concerned about my well-being.

As he drove away, I sat down at the splintery old table and began calculating my extra costs. By now I was five hundred thousand dollars over budget. Early dusk had fallen as I sat alone in the tomblike silence of the unfinished restaurant. Then other headlights flashed across in front and a car door thumped. A man in a dark business suit strode up the wooden plank into the building and began peering around. I rose and approached him. “Can I help you?”

The man eyed my old work clothes. “Oh, just looking around,” he said. “I own a chain of funeral homes, and I hear the owner of this place isn’t going to serve alcohol.” He cocked his head. “He’ll be bankrupt in six months. With all this space, I figure this could be the biggest funeral home in the Midwest.” He shot me a quick smile. “I just wanted to see it now because I figure I’ll be buying it from the fool who’s building it.”

After he left I slumped down at the picnic table and put my head on my arms. An evening breeze blew an old newspaper around my feet. “Oh, Lord,” I groaned, “is there any good news?”

At that another car pulled up. *Uh-oh*, I wondered, *now what?*

Two men and two women stepped out of the car. One man began telling the others, “There will be a dining room seating five hundred, an eighty-eight-foot cafeteria line, and some beautiful banquet halls seating six hundred . . .”

He stepped around the corner, and his face lit up. “Jonathan! I’m just showing my friends your place.”



It was Dr. Gene Hood, pastor of the Nazarene church in nearby Beech Grove. “What’s the matter?” he asked. “You look down. Had a tough day?”

“Well, you kind of picked the worst day of my life.” I recited my troubles, ending up with the “funeral” the local undertaker had just conducted.

He laughed at the story. “Well, I’m excited about your plans,” he said. “I can just see all the Southern gospel singers in your banquet halls.”

Gospel singers? What was he talking about?

Dr. Hood leaned across the table. “If you have enough faith to build this place, I have enough faith to help you keep those banquet halls filled with great gospel-singing groups.”

That was the encouragement I needed. Three months later, on November 7, we opened our doors. Customers began streaming in, and they have been crowding Jonathan Byrd’s Cafeteria and Banquet Hall ever since. Dr. Hood was true to his word; every six weeks our banquet rooms were quickly booked up, and churches began reserving them far in advance.

So the naysayers were wrong. We’re thriving. All of which, I guess, proves that if you count the cost, stick to your principles and leave everything in God’s hands, you’ll have a menu that can’t fail.

From How to Listen to God by Doug Hill, pages 103-107 . Used with permission

### **Discussion questions**

**Question 1:** Underline the place/places *where* the person received guidance. Briefly describe *how* the person received guidance from God in their heart?

**Question 2:** How did this story affect you?

**Question 3:** Does this story or anything contained in it remind you of something in your own life?

**Question 4:** Did you find this story consoling, challenging, comforting? Why?

**Question 5:** In reflecting on this true, modern-day story, what is the take-away for you?

### **V. Closing Prayer: The 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Prayer Card**

Using the “Seeking God’s Guidance” Prayer Card, pray the front side together as a group.

