



# God Guides Us

## Through the Experience of Peace in Our Heart

This insert is the sixth in a series on the ways that God guides us. In developing and deepening our relationship with Jesus, we need to learn about Him through study by using our minds and the gift of reason. We also need to encounter the Person of Christ in our hearts. We will then be convinced that Jesus is real: a living, Divine Person who loves us deeply and guides us.

It is helpful 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. (Adapted from the *Catechism*, paragraph 2563)

It is important to note that in our culture today, the meaning of the word “heart” is used interchangeably with emotions or feelings and this can be a legitimate usage. However, we will never leave aside the definition of “heart” based upon the *Catechism*.

In our heart, we receive guidance from God. Have you ever experienced being moved in a different direction than advised because it didn’t seem right? Have you sensed 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 requires ongoing prayer, a practiced listening to God, to understand His leading.

St. Teresa of Avila explains in her writings how God speaks to our hearts, giving us clues that can guide us along the path He would have us follow. Our intentional times of prayer are essential.

“...St. Teresa insists that we talk to God directly during our time of prayer. And conversation, in the ordinary acceptance of the word, implies a mutual exchange of words and sentiments. She assures us that He most definitely responds to our conversation and converses with us.

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 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... It is well to vary our verbal conversation directed to Christ with periods of silence, so that 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, pages 52, 53).

Any feelings in our heart that we perceive as direction from God will always include an interior experience of peace, the primary hallmark of His guidance. We must submit this guidance to a mature thinking process and a properly formed conscience based on Scripture and Church teaching as we can be swayed by disordered feelings of selfishness, envy or anger etc. Following guidance from God that is properly distinguished – discerned – will always manifest in an increase of faith, hope & charity. When we follow God’s guidance, we may still face difficulties, even opposition. Discerning properly gives us the confidence to hold fast to the direction we have received, knowing that we are following God’s guidance in this situation.

Especially in making big decisions, spiritual discernment should include ongoing prayer and waiting with patience on the Lord to confirm the guidance. Seeking the counsel of a spiritually experienced person is also essential.

We are not always going to understand God’s guidance perfectly. However, if we are seeking God, He will use everything, even our mistakes, to lead us and guide us. We can know with assurance His desire to guide us and that **His peace in our heart will stand as the primary hallmark of this guidance.**

By Ann and Carol Lankford

