

God Guides Us Session 5: Through the Holy Angels.

I. Opening Prayer (5 min.)

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 Guides us through the Holy Angels.

This session examines the ways in which God guides us, with our focus here on the holy angels. In our culture, we tend to think of angels usually as small, ornamental cherubs, whereas in reality, they are powerful, brilliant beings.

Based upon numerous 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 uniquely in providing guardianship and guidance for each person.

Angels are spiritual beings; they are persons, but without bodies. Angels are servants and messengers of God. “Beside each believer stands a guardian angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life” (Catechism of the Catholic Church – hereafter CCC, paragraph 336). God desires nothing more than that we receive His boundless love and be saved by Him. Angels have served and continue to serve this accomplishment of God’s plan, aiding us in our journey – to guide and keep us on track.

Here is one example from the New Testament: “On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb. There was a violent earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. For fear of him, the guards trembled and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who was

crucified. He is not here; for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Go quickly and tell His disciples: He has risen from the dead and is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him" (Mat. 28:1 -7).

It is helpful to understand that there are good angels and bad angels and how this came to be. "The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: The devil and the other demons were created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing," by freely choosing, with clear and full understanding, to reject God. Satan and the fallen angels are creatures, powerful from the fact that they are pure spirits, but still creatures," subject to the Creator God (CCC 391, 395). The fallen angels seek to **mislead** us; they accuse us, they lie to us and tempt us to reject and hate God in an effort to draw us away from Jesus and His desire for our destiny with Him forever. With the help of God's grace and through the **guidance** and assistance He provides us through His holy angels, we are strengthened to engage in this continuous battle for our souls.

A good way to keep an awareness of the reality of the presence of our Guardian Angel is to pray the "Angel of God" prayer often. We can ask for light that allows us to see God's good way (rather than darkness); to be guarded (rather than being left defenseless); to be ruled by being in line with the Word of God (rather than wandering aimlessly); and to be guided with specific directions for personal circumstances.

We will know that we are following the direction of good angels because their guidance will always be in sync with God's Word in the Scriptures and teachings of the Church and will bring peace, joy and the confirmation of other faithful Christians. We see this through a true story of a healing experience of 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 his part in having been among the Dutch soldiers sent to fight the people of Indonesia. It took an encounter with an angel to free him from that burden.

What an incredible gift it is that throughout the span of our lives, we have the watchful care and intercession of angels. Let us be open to receiving the guidance of these angels whom God has assigned to us!

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)

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 Guides Us through the Holy 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?

II. A Story from Scripture in which God gave a person guidance through the message of an angel.

Acts 12:5-11 Peter Freed from Prison

⁵ Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. ⁶ And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. ⁷ Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off *his* hands. ⁸ Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me." ⁹ So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

¹¹ And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod."

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?

III. 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."

From How to Listen to God by Doug Hill, pages 70 - 72. Used with permission

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?