

## Session II

### God's Plan for Us: Discerning the Patterns of His Plan

**Opening Prayer :** To be given by the Priest or leader.

#### **Faith-Sharing focus:**

This session is about discerning the patterns of God's plan for us and how that relates to the Eucharist.

#### **Sharing:**

*But thanks be to God that, although you were once slaves of sin,  
you have become obedient from the heart  
to the pattern of teaching to which you were entrusted. [Rom 6:17]*

Some days everything just seems to go wrong. Some days we ask ourselves, "Does God really have a plan or is this ship cruising without a captain?" We look for patterns as support for the proposition that we do not simply live in chaos, that God was the one who started this whole business and that He is still in charge. Patterns make sense to us and provide assurance that our God, who sometimes seems beyond our grasp, is with us. We use patterns to explain something mysterious by comparing it with something we understand. Once we discern a pattern, we use it to guide us.

Do we recognize the patterns in our own lives and how they relate to Christ? Do we recognize how God works in our daily life? Are there patterns that might tell us what God's plan is for us and whether we are following that plan? There are several different types of patterns that affect our lives.

- **Directional Patterns:** There are those patterns that are directional, i.e. those which tend to lead us a certain way. Just as God prepared Mary perfectly for the role she was to assume, so, too, does he prepare each of us for the work we are to do here on earth. We are each given different talents, skills, strengths, graces and virtues. Some are given musical ability, powers of logical reasoning, and the ability to speak languages or any other number of skills. If we closely look at our strengths and weaknesses and then evaluate the opportunities presented to us in light of those strengths and weaknesses, we may get an inkling of His plan. We need to ask ourselves two things: 1) "How does God want me to use this skill, talent or gift?" and 2) "Will I follow God's will or my own?" Example: No matter how much you want to be a great musician, if God did not give you musical ability, chances are that is not His plan for you. If you are given musical ability, however, then ask, "How can I use this gift to glorify God." Many musicians have done just that successfully.

When considering directional patterns and the Eucharist, we must recognize a dual flow pattern. Christ flows into us, but in turn, he asks you to flow back out with him to others. If the gifts given are to have meaning and purpose, they must be used as Christ would have used them: to do the will of God, to glorify God and to minister to the needs of those around Him. As he pours himself out to us from the cup, he expects us to pour ourselves out to others.

- ***Splatter Patterns:*** There are those patterns in our lives that we often call “coincidences.” These events seem to happen randomly. Yet, their randomness does not indicate that they are not part of His plan. One thing happens and shortly thereafter, another seemingly related thing happens for no apparent reason. Most of us just say, “That was a coincidence,” forget it and move on, until the next coincidence. When an event is small, routine and ordinary, we call it “just a coincidence.” If, on the other hand, it is something big and extra-ordinary, we re-label it and often call it a miracle. Why do these things happen?

Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. [Matt. 6:8]. Could that explain a coincidence? Most people give God the credit for miracles, why not for the “happy coincidences?” Who says God only acts in big ways? God is intimately involved in our lives. He would be involved in every decision we make if we let him. Each week He meets us at the altar and asks us to let Him help with those decisions. He hopes that when you receive Him in the form of bread and wine, you also say “Yes” to accepting His guidance in the week to come. Keeping a “Coincidence Journal” might help discern whether these otherwise casual events form a pattern that makes sense. You may see that the many “coincidences” of your life form part of a pattern designed by God. It may also remind you just how closely God walks with you. While he delights in surprising you with these little acts of his benevolence, he prefers to have you consciously acting in concert with Him on a day to day basis. Have you been splattered with God’s thoughtfulness lately?

- ***Parallel Patterns:*** There are those patterns which form parallels with the lives of others. It is said that “birds of a feather, flock together.” Have you checked your feathers lately? Look at the pattern of the lives of those around you. Are your friends on a path to holiness. Does God play a part in their daily lives? Do you see parallels between the lives of the families with whom you associate? Are they Christian? Do they love God? Do they display and encourage moral values in the way they treat their spouses and children? Does your life and that of your family look like theirs? Is that a good thing?

The New Testament characters understood that much of what had been written in the Old Testament happened and was recorded as an example to them, so that they might learn how to live in concert with God. Now, we have the benefit of looking to both the Old and New Testaments for wisdom and guidance. We look to see how the characters acted, what Jesus had to say about their actions and how he responded to them. We then compare those facts, circumstances and patterns

with the patterns of our own lives. Those patterns are particularly helpful when trying to discern what imperfect people would and should do in an imperfect world.

We were also given a Perfect Example to follow: “You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ***For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*** [John 13:13- 15] We have been provided with the only example we need to live a holy life. Christ asks us to live this holy life each time we receive the Eucharist or, at the very least, to work toward it with our whole heart. Receiving the Eucharist should include a “Yes” to this request. When we receive the Eucharist, Christ asks us to conform our nature to His. He asks us to make our lives look like his. He asks us to sacrifice all of those things that keep us from Him and the Father. He hopes that when we return the following week, we will report to him that we have made some progress on our path toward holiness.

He also asks us to take Him with us when we leave the Church and share Him with the world. We have been called to be an example to others. “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. [1 Pet 2:21]. We have been called to leave a pattern for our children and others to follow. Christ has commissioned us to go forth and take His Word to all the nations, baptizing and teaching them all that he taught. We are to parallel His life.

- **Circular Patterns:** There are those patterns that we do not recognize until later in life when we see “all the pieces” fall together. It is then that we recognize what God’s plan was for us. Mary could have never known at the Annunciation what she would endure. She was given no details of the plan for her. Not many of us would ask to walk in her shoes. Despite a broken heart and all of the hardships she endured, she kept on the path of holiness. She trusted in God. She prayed and put everything in His hands. She could not have understood all that was to happen. She stood at the foot of the cross when Jesus died. She did not understand that she would actually see him again in the upper room. His death was real to her. Yet she believed He would return. In His time, God unfolded the Plan and her faithfulness was rewarded.

Mary allowed the circle to be complete. She was the only solely human link that brought God to us and us to God. That circle continues every Sunday as Christ again comes to us in the Eucharist. That circle grows stronger when we share in the body and blood of her Son with others in the community of faith. The circle also grows in size as we draw others into it by sharing Christ with those who do not know Him. As Mary was a link that completed the circle, so too must we be links to others, drawing them into the One Body of Christ.

### **Sharing Questions:**

1. Have you thought about how you might use your skills and talents to do God's will? Do you use your skill or talent in one of your parish ministries? What is/was the skill and how do/did you use it? How do you think God has prepared you for the plan he has for you? What trials and tests have you endured that made you stronger or enhanced one of your virtues?
2. Do you recall any coincidences that you believed had to be the work of God? Do you see God working in your daily life? How and where do you see him?
3. When you receive communion (or immediately before) what are you thinking about? Did you ever think that Christ was asking you to transform your life? Have you ever gone into mass and given God an account of what you did that week to become more Christ-like? Have you committed to transforming your life? What concrete things did you do? What are you doing now? If this is the first time you have thought about it (and it may be!), what action could you take this week to start the transformation process?
4. Do you look to Christ as your example or do you keep up with the Jones? What keeps you from being more like Christ? If Christ were to ask you to give up one thing or behavior this week that keeps you from being Christ-like, what would it be? Decide on one way in which you will become more Christ-like this week.
5. Do you take Christ to others? Have you increased the Circle of Life through your efforts to share your faith with others? Do you feel comfortable talking about God with strangers or people in your office who might not be Catholic? Why or why not? What would make you more comfortable? Describe how you brought someone to Christ. Do you believe that you have an obligation to share the Gospel with other people?
6. Have you caught a glimpse of God's plan for you yet? If so, what do you think it is? If tomorrow God told you that was NOT the plan, would you be disappointed? If so, do you still think this is God's plan or is it yours?

### **Scripture Passage:**

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.*

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of*

*miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*

*All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. [1 Corinth. 12:1-14]*

**Silent Reflection:**

Consider what you believe to be your greatest gift or charism. Think about how you might use that gift or charism to minister to another member of the One Body this week. Think of something that you do not already normally do and think of ministering to someone you do not already minister to. What could you do? Will you?

**Closing Prayer:** To be given by the Priest or leader.

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