

Talk 1: God's Will For Me

Introduction

What we are taking about in the "God of Life" Series is really the key to a mature Christian life.

I invite you to see these Talks as a support in passing on the faith to the next generations. In other words, these Talks are not primarily for you – they are for the ones you love. That they may have faith and find a home in the Church. These Talks are aimed firstly at your families and secondly, for your faith at work – in other words, finding purpose beyond the paycheck.

People's Hunger for God – Hunger for Truth

Beneath the surface, under the guise of appearances, this age, like any other, is made up of people like you and me. And if you listen carefully, if you look closely, you will discover that people are hungry. We were created to love and be loved, and there is a restlessness, a longing for more, a profound discontent with our lives and with our culture. We sense that something is missing, and deep within we know that nothing we can buy and no worldly pleasure will satisfy our restlessness.

This yearning preoccupies the human heart, and it is neither random nor accidental; everyone has it and we have it for a reason. The Holy Spirit (the "soul of my soul," as Father Kentenich calls him) is at the source of these longings. It is the presence of God in the most interior part of ourselves that calls us to move beyond the surface concerns of our lives, to explore and experience something deeper. Our hunger is not for appearances, nor is it for the fleeting and superficial; it is for something of substance. We are hungry for truth. The people of today are starving for the authentic, thirsting for the tiniest droplet of sincerity, aching to experience the genuine.

Those of us who call ourselves Christian do so because we believe that the life and teachings of Jesus Christ are the personification of truth, sincerity, and authenticity, and, in a practical sense, simply the best way to live. If we are correct in this belief, and if the people of the twenty-first century really are hungering for authenticity and the best way to live, then as Christians we must ask ourselves questions such as: Why are more people not enthusiastically embracing Christianity? Why, in fact, are so many people so hostile toward Christ and his Church? I sense it is because the people of today believe that Christians, Christianity, and perhaps Catholics in particular are as much a part of this culture

of appearance and deception as anyone else. This is a harsh truth that needs to be faced. People's desire for truth has not diminished, but they have become wary, doubtful, skeptical, and, sadly, even cynical in their search for truth. And to be honest, I cannot blame them for their attitude. I do not agree with their position, but I understand it. And perhaps more important, I can see how they arrived at this place.

More than ever, our non-Christian and non-practicing brothers and sisters are sending you, me, and all of Christianity a message. Though they are probably not aware of it, they are indirectly giving witness to the Gospel. For within the message the people of our times are sending us, there is a profound challenge for you and me to embrace a life rooted more fully in the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. Their message is clear, unmistakable, and disarmingly simple. Our siblings, parents, and children are sending us this message, as are our friends, neighbors, and colleagues. They are saying, whispering, crying out, "Don't tell me—show me!" Their plea comes from a longing deep within them and represents their great hunger. They don't want to see another television evangelist, they don't want to read another book or hear another CD about Christianity. They want the real thing. They want to witness someone, anyone—just one will do—living an authentic life, someone whose words are supported by the authority of his or her actions. Someone striving humbly but heroically to live by what is good, true, and noble in the midst of—and in spite of—the modern climate.

In reference to the well-known fact that Gandhi read from the New Testament every day and often quoted the Christian Scriptures, a reporter once asked him why he had never become a Christian. He answered, "If I had ever met one, I would have become one." In his own way, Gandhi was saying, "Don't tell me—show me!" revealing his yearning for an example of an authentic Christian life.

Faith in the Family

It seems ever more difficult to transmit the faith to the young generations, also in the family. Why is all this happening? Not only does it seem more difficult but it is in fact so, and for a very simple reason: if there is something that children and young people fear it is to be an outsider. If they come from practicing families they are usually doubly outsiders. They are so, in the first place, in their parish, where they are in the minority and where the normal program, instead, is rarely tailored to fit their age. They are outsiders in school in seeking friends.

Whereas half a century ago a youth who did not go to church had to justify himself; his family and the whole vicinity was worried. Today it is exactly the opposite: if a youth goes regularly to church on Sundays, he is a real exception, and he must justify himself, at least in his meetings with his friends. Hence, parents must educate their children in a strongly a-religious context.

When it is held that it is scientifically demonstrated that the world was born by chance and that man is, therefore, the mere product of purely biological processes, then God is no longer present in people's minds – this was the greatest challenge for Father Kentenich – the absence of God in people's lives; he spoke about people today “running away from God”.

And, when in the industrialized societies of the Western world people can insure themselves against all sorts of risks, then it is rather easy to delay for the longest possible time the questions on the meaning of life, the questions “from where?”, “to where?”, and “why.”

Consequently, today a Christianity made up purely of tradition no longer has sufficient persuasive force. Only a personal relationship with God has a contagious effect! Hence, religious parents should – so to speak – come out from the “catacombs” as Father Kentenich said. They must always tell their children what they have experienced with God, and why they are joyful and convinced Christians. They must address the discussions, speak of God and of the great works He has done for us and not wait for the school and the community to transmit the necessary knowledge of the faith. In the matter of Christian faith parents -- and also teachers – cannot presuppose anything any longer; they must propose everything, everything must be explained.

Faith at Work

How to balance faith, family and work and how to do it in today's secularized world? This is the big question for many Catholics today. Maintaining balance between family and work can be difficult, but it's a worthy struggle.

Get Me Off This Roller Coaster! – This is a common comment or cry that we often hear. We need to make a plan for our life – where our priorities shift – in other words, we need to spend much more time with each other and with our children.

Why is it so difficult to bring one's faith to work? I think there is a mistaken notion that living our faith at work means that we're called to proselytize, or preach at others. Not only is this ineffective, it ignores the fact that the Gospel can't be forced upon anyone -- God created freewill, and we need to respect and honor his design and Jesus' example (remember how people walked away in John, Chapter 6?)

In my humble opinion, the workplace is the front line of the new evangelization. We need to propose the Gospel in a way that honors the dignity of our co-workers: first and foremost, we need to live it ourselves. To the extent that we model the virtues in our work, being a good Catholic and being a good worker should cause us to act in precisely the same way. There is no contradiction here! Put another way, by being good Catholics we should become better workers, and by being better workers we should become better Catholics.

There is a tacit acceptance of the "check your faith at the door" mentality in far too many cases today. We have bought into a deception that in order to respect others, we must suspend our beliefs. This is nonsense. In fact, *Gaudium et Spes* clearly addressed this matter: "This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age." (43) Rather, the answer lies in a radical integration of our faith and work -- doing the best job possible (since we're working for God) while praying for our humble efforts to be sanctified. Father Kentenich called this "everyday sanctity" -- doing ordinary things at work, extraordinarily well -- i.e. in union with God, and in, through and for love.

We have all lived in the soup of moral relativism for some time now. The only proper response appears to be lives of radical holiness and commitment to Christ. I am reminded of the words of Simon Peter, again in John, Chapter 6: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

We have only begun to scratch the surface of the depth and beauty of our faith. Yet the more we learn, the more we recognize that the faith calls us to allow the Gospel to permeate every aspect of our lives. This isn't easy, but if we believe the promises of Christ (and wedo), it's worth it.

Being Catholic doesn't make things easier, but it gives us purpose -- it gives our families and loved ones purpose.

A Consistent Faith is Needed

The faith that we need today is another faith that suddenly becomes very enthusiastic and then quickly burns out and fizzles out. We could imagine this in two images. Imagine that we are a "faith oven". We can either be heated with peat or with coal. If we are heated by peat, then we have for a short time a bright burning fire, but there is little heat and the fire does not last long. However, if we heat the oven with coal, then we have a long-lasting, warm and glowing heat. The "faith oven" needs to be continuously heated by coal and that is the faith of the mature Christian, the mature individual -- calm, thoughtful, deep strong and youthful. What is the point of being suddenly enthusiastic and wanting to do this or that, here and there, it afterwards there is no warmth and everything becomes cold again. We need "faith ovens" in every street, in every school, in every Parish today -- now!

However, we need a quality of faith today that is different from half a century ago. We need a faith that can cope with an atmosphere that is anti-Christian -- with a society that has forgotten God. Father Kentenich called this type of faith -- Practical Faith in Divine Providence.

What is Divine Providence?

What is Divine Providence? It is the activity of God when he cares for you and me. He cares by realising his Plan of Love in our lives and he will see this plan through to the end.

Believing in Divine Providence is not enough. The practical faith is a daily activity. It means we can trust in God above everything else and it means that God will care for us, he will look after us. This was the great charism of Father Kentenich. He knew that just believing in God's Providence was not enough – we have to apply it in our daily lives of faith. For this reason, he spoke about “practical faith” in Divine Providence. It's got to be practical – hands-on, useable and most of all relevant for today's Catholics. Otherwise, what is the point?

This is the cornerstone – your spiritual journey needs, as a key element, a relationship to God that motivates you to discover his Will. The person who can do this takes the presence of God in his life seriously. The mature Catholic is the one who gets up every morning and asks God: “What do you want me to do today?”

A practical faith in Divine Providence is the conviction that God is really present and active in the world and in our personal lives. The Church understands itself as the “pilgrim people of God” moving closer to God through time and history.

The practical faith in Divine Providence is a spirituality, which gives us the tools we need to encounter the living God in our world, to live with this God of life in a Covenant of Love, and to co-operate with God in the fulfilment of his plan of love, wisdom and power.

The practical faith in Divine Providence shows us concrete ways to encounter and discover God in the many ups and downs and demands of modern life, and to develop for ourselves are genuine and vibrant personal relationship with God.

Schoenstatt's Original Charism – An Active Faith with Mary

In the Schoenstatt shrine, our Lady wants to call those who have “youthful hearts” -- this does not always mean those who have a youthful enthusiasm. What is a youthful heart? That is the heart that always remains young -- and it remains young through the spirit of God, through the Holy Spirit, that is present and active in our hearts. A youthful heart has nothing to do with age -- this should always be alive in us irrespective of age -- we should always be vibrant, and we should always wish to strive for more than the mediocre. People who have youthful hearts are the ones who are attentive and open for the Divine in their lives.

Two aspects to Schoenstatt's original charism of Divine Providence.

Firstly, our “brand” of practical faith in Divine Providence, includes in a special way, our Lady. We have a Marian mission for today. Our faith tells us that our Lady is the permanent companion of Christ. Where Christ is, our Lady is also

present at his side. She cooperates with him in the work of salvation. One of the biggest challenges today is to encounter God in daily life, and daily experiences. There are Christians who think that they will only encounter God in Church during a religious ceremony; they think that they can only talk to God when they pray the rosary or use prayers learnt by heart from a prayer book. Mary helps us to find God in life and to talk to him. To achieve this, we need time to understand the “messages” that God sends to us. In other words, we need our Lady’s attitude of openness, and patience in order to discover what God wants from us.

In the new Testament, a phrase about our Lady appears on two occasions; it simply says: “she pondered all these things in her heart”. The phrase appears after the shepherds left the stable in Bethlehem, and also when Mary and Joseph found the child Jesus in the temple. Mary did not always immediately understand the things that were happening to her. But she trusted God and gave herself the time and opportunity to “ponder these things” and discover God’s will for her. She asked herself the question: “what does God want to say to me through this?” “what does this suffering or this joy mean in the love story that God is writing with me?” Every day of our life, every event of our life is a “love letter” that God writes to us. Finding God in our lives, means that we first start to look for him in our past, and to see and discover his hand in the events and experiences of our lives that have marked us the most -- be they happy ones or sad and sorrowful ones. Nothing happens by accident, nothing happens by coincidence or chance. “in God we live, we move and we have our being” (Acts 17:24–28). Once we know how God works in our past, then we will find it so much easier to read and understand the messages of God. Every experience, every event, every happening can be compared to “voices” or “letters from God”. If we find God in our past and in our present, then the future will not make us afraid. God is the Lord of history, the God of a personal love, the God who has the “helm of the ship” in his hands. In Schoenstatt, we ask our Lady to give us the eyes we need to discover the presence of the God of Providence in our lives. We ask her to give us the eyes to see our world as one great “Love story” written by God and humanity. We ask her to give us the eyes to be able to see God everywhere, and to see him in everything. In other words, the grace to “ponder”.

Secondly, our Divine Providence if it comes from Schoenstatt is always an active way of living faith. We often run the risk, strangely enough, that’s our spirituality can seem to be feminine. Obviously, our spirituality must also be feminine, or childlike. We need the experience of being able to be open for God, to be able to say “yes” to God. However, this is one side of the coin -- this is more a receptive, but necessary approach. For example, when we have to carry the cross of illness. What should we do? Our faith asks us to see “yes”. However, saying “yes” is often not enough. Sometimes, we also have to say “let’s do it”! This implies a stronger sense of an active faith. Through Divine Providence, we strive to realise step by step the aims that God put before us. It’s not just about accepting sacrifices; it’s also about having clear aims -- aims that will demand all our strengths -- aims that want to move us forward.

These two aspects reveal the originality of our understanding of Divine Providence in Schoenstatt.

The General Will of God

Practical Faith in Divine Providence means that we believe in a God who genuinely cares for us and who guides us every day of our life. This forms the basis for any faith in Divine Providence -- we need to be convinced of this. This God of Providence guides all things to their ultimate purpose and destiny. His ways are always difficult for us to understand. Why? Because God is a mystery -- the greatest mystery -- in himself. If God is truly God then a lot of what he does will always remain incomprehensible to us.

God leads us to our ultimate aim

God leads us to our ultimate aim -- and this aim is a supernatural aim. At the end of the day, our final aim is to live with God for ever in heaven, and share in the communion of love with him. God governs the world, God governs each one of us, God guides the world, and God guides each one of us. Nevertheless, we all experience a great deal of darkness in our lives. A lot of what happens in our lives will only be explained and finally understood when we see God face to face. Until that time, we have to live with experiences that are incomprehensible to us, we have to live with darkness, misunderstandings, events and situations that we can understand. This applies, naturally, to our own lives, to our families, or to the world in general. Everything that God does -- radically everything -- is motivated by that final purpose that he has for us -- even when it leads us on unknown and difficult paths.

Why so much darkness?

Why is there so much darkness, why are there unknown paths? Two reasons can help us here: God, at the end of the day, is the greatest mystery, and for this reason his ways are mysterious, and often incomprehensible. And secondly, the aim -- the ultimate purpose of our lives -- will only be realised in heaven. In other words, it is a supernatural aim.

St Thomas Aquinas once wrote: "God allows evil only so as to make something better result from it". Evil and darkness in this world are obscure and painful mysteries. Even the crucified experienced darkness in his life, he asks his Father, "my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Much about it is incomprehensible.

One thing, though, we know for sure: God is 100% good. He can never be the originator or author of something evil. God created the world to be good, that it is not yet complete. In violent appeals and painful processes it is being shaped and moved towards its final perfection. That may be a better way to classify what the judge called "physical evil", for example, a birth defect, or a natural catastrophe. "Moral evils", in contrast, come about through the misuse of freedom in the world. "Hell on earth" -- child soldiers, suicide bombings, concentration camps, the murder of innocent teenagers in a summer camp, abuse of children -- they are all usually man-made, and manifestations of man's use of his gift of freedom. The decisive question is therefore not, "how can anyone believe in a good God when there is so much evil?" But rather, "how could a person with a heart and understanding endure life in this world as if God did not exist?" Christ's death and resurrection show us that evil did not have the first word, nor does it have the last. God makes absolutely good results from the worst evil. We also believe that in the last judgement God will put an end to all injustice, darkness and evil. In the life of the world to come, evil no longer has any place and suffering will end.

CS Lewis once wrote: "God whispers in our joys; he speaks in our conscience. But in our sorrows he shouts. They are the megaphone with which he awakens a deaf world".

Divine Providence is when we believe that God will lead everyone and everything to its final goal. He has a Plan for us. This Plan is a Divine Plan, it is a Plan of wisdom and a Plan of love.

God's Plan – Wisdom, Love and Power

According to Church teaching, Divine Providence is the faith that a loving and caring God will lead all creation -- including humanity -- to its ultimate aim. Another way of expressing this is our faith that God has, from eternity, and original plan for each one of us. How can we describe this plan?

First of all, God's plan for us is a plan of wisdom, secondly a plan of love, and thirdly a plan conceived through his almighty power. It is a plan that God has

designed from eternity. This means that nothing is coincidental -- everything that happens in our life doesn't happen by chance. This plan is inspired by God's wisdom, inspired by God's love and inspired by God's almighty power.

Divine Providence means that what God has designed, what he has foreseen in his plan, he will lead us to end the smallest and most mean you to detail. Nothing happens by chance. Jesus gave us wonderful examples of how detailed God's plan is. In Matthew's Gospel and it looks gospel he speaks about the fact that not even hairs from our head fall to the ground without God knowing about it (Matthew 10:29-31; Luke 12:6; Luke 21:18).

St Edith Stein once wrote: "what did not lie in my plan lay in God's plan. And the more often something like this happens to me, the lively becomes the conviction of my faith that -- from God's perspective -- nothing is accidental."

Divine Providence simply does not work and remains useless and inanimate when it is a theory in our heads -- even though it sounds like a wonderful theory. For Divine Providence to work you can't just make it a "thinking exercise" -- it becomes reality when we actually do it and live it (Romano Gardini).

A Child holding God's Hand

St Frances de Sales paints a beautiful picture of what it means to live Divine Providence. We should imagine that our life here on earth is like a child walking along a path beside a deep ditch. We do not walk alone on this path -- we hold hands with our Father in heaven. What does this mean? Even though we may be in danger of falling into the ditch, the hand of my father is holding tightly onto me. And this hand is a strong hand, it is a father's hand, it is the hand of Almighty God, it is a hand of the all wise God, it is the hand of the ever loving God who holds me tightly, and will never let me go irrespective of what may happen. There is no greater joy or source of happiness, than to know that we can hold tightly onto the hand of God in our lives -- this is practical faith in Divine Providence. What is Divine Providence? It is all about God who makes himself a mother. What he has planned, he will also realise right up to the tiniest detail.

Heaven is our Ultimate Aim

A vibrant faith starts to take place in us when we consciously look for what is God's will. What does God want for everyone? He wants everyone to go to heaven. Everyone! He wants us to live with him forever in eternal life. He wants communion with us. The reason behind salvation history is to bring each and every one of us home to the Father.

How do you get to heaven? You need to become a saint? This is your choice, you either become a saint or you go to hell. God wants us to be holy and he has chosen us to be holy so that we can go to heaven and be with him.

In the New Testament we can read:

1 Timothy 2:4

“... [God] wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth...”

Or this beautiful verse: Ephesians 1:4–6

“...For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight in love...”

Our goal as followers of Jesus Christ is to become holy. The Catechism used to express this in another way.

"Why did God make you?": "God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next."

Father Kentenich's dream was that Schoenstatt would help people to achieve this universal call to holiness. He spoke about the "Everyday Saint" – already in the 1930's a book came out with this title. It is all about ordinary people, who do ordinary things, doing them extra-ordinary well out of a radical love of God, and love for neighbour and love for all of God's wonderful creation.

What does it mean to be holy? It doesn't mean you become a sissy, or become really weird. It means that you become real. That is the amazing thing about Pope John Paul. He canonized ordinary people who were very real.

Look at Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. When I was growing up I used to think all saints were old, had bad health, prayed all the time, and lived hundreds of years ago.

Pier Giorgio was born April 6, 1901, in Turin, Italy. He enjoyed sports, especially mountain climbing in the Italian mountains that surrounded his home town. Pier Giorgio loved to laugh and joke around which earned him the name of "Holy Terror" from his friends. He used to smoke like a chimney too. There was something else different about Pier Giorgio. He loved poor people and he did something about it. Many times Pier Giorgio walked home because he had given his train fare to a poor person. On one occasion he arrived home without his coat when the temperature was 12 degrees below zero. Pier Giorgio liked to say, "Christ comes to visit me in the Holy Eucharist; I repay the visit by going to find him in the poor." This love for the poor started when he was a kid and lasted until he died. As he was dying he asked for a paper and pen and wrote out a message asking that all he owned be given to the poor. Pier Giorgio worked closely with the poor. It was believed that because of his many visits to the poor he caught poliomyelitis (polio). He forgot about his own health to take care of his grandmother when she was dying. By the time the doctors discovered how weak Pier Giorgio himself was, it was too late to help him. After six days of painful suffering, he died on July 4, 1925, at the age of 24. When the news got out that Pier Giorgio had died, thousands of people came to the funeral, many of whom were the poor people Pier Giorgio had helped.

Here is another example: For the first time, a married couple is beatified together. John Paul II fulfilled a long-held desire today when he beatified a husband and wife together, highlighting the fact that holiness is not restricted to religious and priests. The new blessed are Luigi (1880–1951) and Maria (1884–1965) Beltrame Quattrocchi of Rome, who were married for 50 years and had four children, three of whom are still alive and attended today's ceremony in St. Peter's Basilica. Their two sons, Filippo and Cesare, were among the priests who concelebrated the beatification Mass with the Pope. Their daughter Enrichetta was among the faithful attending the Mass. "These spouses lived conjugal love and the service to life in the light of the Gospel and with great human intensity," he said. "They assumed with full responsibility the task of collaborating with God in procreation, dedicating themselves generously to the education, guidance and direction of their children in discovering his plan of love."

Sometimes we get weird ideas about what it means to be holy, or what it means to be a saint. Being holy means that you are radically in love with God.

Here is a good definition of holiness: You are a saint when God's will and my will become one. That means I live out of a real relationship with God, a desire a real communion with him. It means that there is no difference anymore between what I want and what God wants. We both want the same thing.

God does not want us to go to purgatory or to hell, he wants us to go to heaven. He wants us to be with him for always. How do you go right to heaven? By being a saint and united your will to God's. Father Kentenich called this the "Blank Cheque". You cannot give more to God than the Blank Cheque. So we know what God wants of us, the question is this what you want? Is this your goal?

Imagine that you had a list of the top ten goals in your life. Would becoming a saint be even on the list? This is where it all has to begin. Think of the Lord Jesus at the crucifixion. After he died, who went first to heaven? The Good Thief, tradition calls him Dismas. Jesus said to him: "Today you will be with me in Paradise". This guy had led a miserable life probably, stole things, etc. but at the end he repented and was saved by the grace and love of God for him.

God's Will for Today's Women

Nine convicted men, one of whom was from Afghanistan, and the rest of whom were of Pakistani origin were convicted last week of hurting and abusing young girls. The victims of the gang were plied with cigarettes and alcohol before being passed around the group of men for sex. During the trial, the court heard how one victim was forced to have sex with 20 men in one night whilst drunk. Another was so inebriated that she vomited over the side of the bed while two men had sex with her.

Every Catholic man should be devoted to the understanding, upholding, and defending the dignity of women. This is the mission of every man, but so many men today have tragically let women down—individually and collectively.

What does God say about women?

First of all, we have to say that the message of Jesus is, without doubt, Good News for every woman. From the first book of the Bible, Genesis, God gave all women and men the same dignity. The greatest message of Genesis is very clear: “God created people in his image and likeness—he created them as man and woman (Genesis 1:27). In other words, the human being comes in two varieties—male and female. We have to understand more the reason for and the consequences of the Creator’s decision that the human being should always and only exist as a woman or a man. When God created the world, he didn’t do it randomly, haphazardly, or accidentally. God created the world with order, purpose and design. He is a master builder, a craftsman (see Wisdom 13).

When we look at these issues, we actually bring to mind again the age-old questions that man and woman often reflect on when considering the purpose and the meaning of life: **what is a human being? What is the meaning and purpose of our life? What is goodness and what is sin? What gives rise to our sorrows, and to what intent? Where lies the path to true happiness? What is the truth about death, judgement and retribution beyond the grave? What finally, is that ultimate and unutterable mystery which engulfs our being, and from which we take our origin and towards which we move?** These questions, and many others like them, testified to the “aspirations of the human spirit in search of God.”

Men and women are called—according to Genesis—to work together and to support each other, because they are dependent on each other and need each other for wholeness and complementarity.

One of the most important messages of Father Kentenich was to emphasise the originality and uniqueness of women and how that originality should never be allowed to diminish or become secondary. He had a great admiration for women and devalued women in their originality. On one occasion he said: “women have become the prisoners of history, and it is the task of these modern times to ransom the prisoners, and to break the chains.”

He also found that one of the greatest tragedies of today’s culture, that we have a very strong culture with masculine characteristics. And in such a culture, it becomes very easy to understand women and compare women and to measure women according to the way a man thinks—in other words that masculine values or masculine trends understood as the norm for everyone. His hope was—and this should be one of the biggest contributions of Schoenstatt in the church today—is that women find again the awareness of the own particular mission, and

he was further convinced that if women have clarity how God sees them and have the courage to bring that essence of women and understanding of women into today's culture, then that will bring a huge blessing not only for society, or for the professional world and workplace, but particularly for the family.

Today, some attack the church as “anti-woman” because she steadfastly opposes divorce, contraception, and abortion. Others claim that the all-male priesthood is a sure sign of bias against women. For this reason, we have to reflect again on the foundation of the dignity and location of women which is to be found in God's design of man and woman and in the redemption in Jesus Christ.

Men and women share the same dignity and are equal, however, they are not the same they are different. And God has created them to be different. For this reason, we don't want to minimise the difference or ignore the difference we want to load the differences to complemented each other and to make each other whole mutually. **This difference between man and woman is not a huge difference.** That are many things which are similar leaving the same in the biological or psychological make of man and woman. In other words, they shared a great deal in common.

For this reason, when we speak about men and women and their differences we can only speak about a plus or a minus—are more or less. Without doubt, women have a plus in intuition, a plus in the capacity to love in at Hills the and holistic way, the capacity to love in a spiritual way. The love that women bring into the world is a love that primarily comes from the soul. Father came to make also felt that because women are called to be mothers, they have a plus in the ability to to suffer and in the early capability to endure suffering.

The symbol of Eve formed from the side of Adam is a message of equality and sharing in the same Divine nature. Eve was not created from the head of Adam, or from his feet, she was created from his side, indicating that she is his companion and shares with him this same dignity and merits the same respect.

God gives the woman the name “Eve” which indicates her unique strength and her unique mission – all women are called to give life and care for life. The name “Eve” literally means –“mother of the living”. Also in the book of Genesis, we hear how God—after the fall of original sin – says that a woman will crush the head of the serpent and she will definitively conquer sin and evil once and for all. This woman is our Lady, and her “means” to crush the head of the serpent is through her Divine Son, Jesus Christ. He is the universal liberator and, in a very special way, the greatest liberator of women.

In the life and in the person of Mary, God has given us a message of hope – he shows us how he understands women and what he expects from women. The Church calls Mary the “new Eve” and sees in her an example of womanhood and

the unique dignity of women. Even though men and women share exactly the same dignity, they are not the same; they are very distinct in their own originality., in their own needs and in the values that they can bring to the world. The Mother of God represents for us a model of womanhood – the capacity to care for and engender human life.

We can see this, for example, in the different ways that God has created the female and the male body. Already here we can see the difference between men and women. The differences in the body reflect the differences in the soul. A woman's body is designed for life – every part of her is designed to protect and engender life. Mothers, for example, have an amazing ability to connect with their children. They say that mothers can hear their own child cry even though she may be standing in another room. Mothers understand the needs ,the joys, the sorrows of their own children in a very powerful way. Women are experts in the field of relationships – n the field of personal relationships.

Some writers today say that the deepest cause of the crisis in our society and in our culture today in the West is because we stress too much and emphasise too much the masculine and we ignore too much the values of the feminine. The values of relationship, the values of dialogue the full values of understanding and caring for life. Caring for life means that we don't hurt people and use people like those men from Rochdale. The opposite of love is to "use" – using someone for your own gratification.

One woman wrote in a magazine that women today are like "walking entertainment for men." Sadly, the modern media saturates young women with the message that a girl's value is determined by a boy's reaction to her. Her value comes from Almighty God.

Before he became pope, Karol Wojtyła gave a presentation to college women, in which he said, **"Men must be taught to love, and to love in a noble way; they must be educated in depth in this truth, that is, in the fact that a woman is a person and not simply an object."** The primary tool by which women educate men about their dignity is through the virtue and the clarity of their identity and dignity.

Many young women have told me, after squandering years of their lives in unhealthy relationships and estranged from God, "I don't even know who I am anymore." The opposite happens when we turn to Him. We find our identity . . . and mission.

It would be truly a great thing if our young women today could see in the image of Mary, the Mother of God a reflection of the mission, the dignity and their unique calling from God. Let's pray, in a special way, in this month of May, that all the women of our Parish can be a reflection of Mary in their homes and in our workplaces and in their streets.

What a change we would experience in our society!

The question of the vocation, mission and dignity of women, I believe, has become so much more important today because of the needs and the urgent call to a new evangelisation. This new evangelisation includes, in a very special and powerful way, the reaching out to those who have been baptised, however, are not evangelised. In other words, they do not practice the faith that they were given. And perhaps, this is a greater challenge, then trying to reach out in the traditional missionary sense, to those who have never hear about Jesus Christ or his Gospel message.

The conviction for Catholics is that Jesus Christ reveals to us who we are. This is very important to understand, and at the end of the day, this is the cornerstone of a great part of Church teaching. The Second Vatican Council made this an integral part of the contents of their message: **“Jesus Christ truly reveals us to ourselves, and makes our supreme calling clear.”** How does Jesus do this? **He does this by showing us and reminding us how God created us from the beginning. Here the main message is about our own greatness as men and women. He reminds us that each of us has been created with the possibility of eternal life in communion with God and all the saints. This is the true greatness of our unique personal being. Because we are created in the image and likeness of God, we have the vocation to love like God and be like God in our life and in our actions. this can only be truly realised in “sincere self giving.**

In our human bodies, we see already imprinted in their and our vocation. The body of a man has no sense by itself–the body of a woman has no sense by itself. They are made for each other–they are made to “fit” into each other. For this reason the ultimate vocation of every human being is to be a “sincere gift” for someone else. We are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life.

It is interesting, that the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, gives us also insights into how do original sin has effected men and women differently. While in general all human beings are affected **by the disorder of the passions, the clouding of the intellect, and weakening of the will, the text of Genesis suggests a clue to some gender–differentiated inheritances of original sin.**

Women tend to use a man more out of sentimentality while men tend to use our woman more out of sensuality. Men very often men treat women as objects–in other words, when you look at a woman, they don't see a person, they see an object for their gratification and pleasure and use. Remember, the opposite of love

is using someone for your own gain. Women tend to be possessive of the ones they love.

In Genesis we read: **“your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16)**. This domination is a loss of the stability of that fundamental equality, but it also means that women are treated as an object and the calling to be a sincere gift for the other is lost. **In other words, every woman must work to overcome a tendency to possess those she loves. Her inheritance from original sin is captured in the phrase “your desire shall be for your husband.” This tendency in a woman, to want to possess those she loves can extend to her children as well.**

The man also has to work to overcome his specific inheritance of original sin. This means that every woman cannot become the “object” of “domination” and still “possession”.

Also, the words, “he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16) must not lead to another type of domination—i.e. the domination where women allow—perhaps without knowing it—the **masculinisation** of women. In other words, in the name of liberation from male “domination,” women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics and sacrifice their feminine originality. I

think, one example of this is in their conference of women in Beijing, China. It was amazing how you could see the powerful tendency of first world women who sought to impose their positions about contraception, abortion, and women’s reproduction onto third world women. It almost looked like some kind of new “colonialism”.

The Woman caught in adultery

Jesus Christ reveals every woman to herself. And when he walked upon this earth, he revealed to each woman he met who she was and who she was called to be. He did this by first entering into the concrete and historical situation of women, a situation which is weighed down by the inheritance of sin, such as in his encounter with the woman accused of adultery and the men who were about to stone her. In his encounter with her, and by his words, he awakens in the women and all the men present a consciousness of their own sin; then, looking towards the future, he tells them not to sin again. A woman is left alone, exposed to public opinion with “her sin,” while behind her there lurks a man – a sinner, guilty as she is, indeed equally responsible for it. And yet his sin escapes notice, it is passed over in silence. Christ’s way of acting here, the gospel of his words and deeds is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women. This woman feels liberated by the truth. She is restored to herself. She feels loved with eternal love and with a love which finds direct expression in Christ himself.

The Samaritan Woman

Another example of how Christ believes women is the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus defended women who were discriminated against or devalued by the men around them, referring directly to such painful situations of women as being an unwed mother, widow, or abandoned mother of children. For this reason, the church will always raise its voice against the discrimination against women who choose to be wives and mothers. The discrimination against girls in education. Any violence against women especially in the underground trade and enslavement of women. And any exploitation of women's bodies. The often unhappy situation of many women who have to make do with living together with their partners and really want to marry. Tragically, a new form of violence against females which has been done by women themselves as recently been well documented—"the global war against baby girls"—due to the fateful collision between overweening son preference, the use of rapidly spreading prenatal sex determination technology for gender-based abortion, and the law dramatically declining fertility levels.

We see that after the encounter being oneself in relation to Jesus Christ, who reveals to a person who he or she really is, and after seeing the liberating effect that the encounter with Jesus Christ had on several women in the gospel, He then sends some of these women forward in their vocation to serve in a specified way. To merely Magdalen, who was the first to see the risen Christ, he said: "go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my father and to your father, to my God and to your God." Then Mary Magdalen came to be called "the apostle of the apostles".

The "Genius of Women"

Pope John Paul the Great often spoke of the "genius of women". For him this genius included the fact that all human life in a very special way is entrusted to women. Obviously man is also involved in their procreation of human life, but it is nothing in comparison to the sacrifice that women must wait in carrying life for nine months in the own bodies. Because of this, because every human life is entrusted to women, it is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person, and motherhood develops this predisposition even more. Their "feminine genius" is a way of describing a woman's way of acting and living in this world. For this reason, it is so important is that we bring out again the full truth about women. Not only by considering great and famous women of the past or present but also those ordinary women who reveals the gift of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday lives. By giving themselves to others each day women fulfil their deepest vocation. What is the "genius of man"? It is to radiate fatherhood by characteristically adopting, protecting and providing.

The essential characteristic of the genius of the woman is the fact that she receives a human being that is entrusted to her and she fosters the growth of that human being, for whom she is responsible in a unique way. A woman is strong because of our awareness of this because of the fact that God “entrusts every human being to her in a special way. It is the struggle of each and every woman today to decide whether she will say “yes” or “no” to God and his eternal plan for

The hope is that every woman, and every girl, develop their genius for the good of society women must first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person: a person who is recognised in love because of the dignity which comes from being a person and not from other considerations, such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty or health. This is the fundamental contribution which the church and humanity expect from women. And it is the indispensable prerequisite for an authentic cultural change.

When we speak about the dignity invocation of women, it is so important to bring into this understanding our Lady’s place in the church and in the world. When we consider the mother of God, we consider a woman who freely chose with our will to accept the invitation for her sublime vocation. In other words, it is so important for the teaching of the church, that the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the beginning of the new covenant, the new start in the history of humanity, begins with the “yes” of a woman. All of God’s actions in human history at all times respects the free will of the human “I”. This is not to be minimalised in any way – a woman began the process of incarnation – not a man.

God’s Will for me

Let’s look now at knowing God’s will for each one of us personally. Let me quote you a beautiful verse from the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 1:5

“...Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” God looks at Jeremiah and says to him: “Before I formed you in the womb...” where was he before being in the womb? He was with God – the soul living in the love of God. God had a plan for Jeremiah before he had even drawn breath, before he was even “a twinkle in his daddy’s eye”.. He had something original for him, something particular that he had never given to anyone else.

God gives us a mission, a task. It is original and unique to us. We should never be like other people. No one beside us, or before us, or after us has this Plan. This Plan includes our family background, it includes our personality.

Look at the apostles, each one of them was different. John was the one who was madly in love with Jesus and wasn’t afraid to show it. He put his head on the chest

of Christ. Peter had a big foot and it always ended up in his mouth. He did a lot of crazy things. Jesus called him Satan, Peter betrayed Jesus just like Judas did, but Jesus made him the first Pope.

The person God made you to be, he has chosen to be holy. Every one of us is special and mean so much to God. We should never think that we can't do anything. We are too old, or too sick...

We can intercede for others through prayer. What is Jesus doing right now in heaven. He is interceding for the world. If you pray, when you are elderly or sick or housebound, you are doing something very worthwhile for others. You are doing what Jesus does.

One of my favourite poems from G.K. Chesterton expresses that everyone is valued and special, even when it does not appear so. God has something in mind for all of us.

The poem is called: The Donkey.

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born;

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

God is interested in each and every one of us and cares for all of us. Each person means so much to him and we all have a mission to accomplish. Salvation is always a gift that is given personally and individually. When we really believe this and are touched by this, then we grow in faith and we move on in our spiritual journey.

St Ignatius of Loyola when he wrote his "Stations of the Cross", he added to each and every station: "and all this he did for me - et omnia haec propter me. We are

God's "favourite pastime". He just wants to be with us and live our lives with us. He can't take his eyes off us. How can we possibly speak of inferiority complex after this!

Ways to Discover God's Will

We can discover the will of God for us through the message of holy Scripture and through the teaching of the Church. Apart from these two main sources, Father Kenterich also speaks about "three voices" in the experiences of daily life that can also become sources of discovering God's will for us: he speaks about the voice of the times, the voice of our soul, and the voice of being.

The voice of the times is the opportunity to discover God's will in what is happening around us, for example, in the various currents of life of our times, the needs of our times, the problems of our times, or the challenges of our times. Of course, we have to discern and differentiate between "the spirit in the times" -- which includes God's liberating, healing and saving power, and the "spirit of the times", which is an expression of destructive powers. The voice of our soul is an expression of hope God speaks to us individually and how he inspires us in the Holy Spirit. The voice of being refers to God's will expressed in the constant, basic structures and rhythms of creation.

The "Voices" of the Living God

What is God asking of me? What is God's will for me? There are three "voices" that we need to look at: God tells us his will through events, through the inspirations in my own soul and through his creation.

Voice of the Times

God reveals his will for each one of us through events and the things that are happening around us. The times in which we live are original, just like everyone one of us is original. That's is why it is important to question the times, and look closely at what is happening.

We should use the things that happen to us as a "window" to God. I "look through" them and I see the intention of God. It is really a masterpiece of faith if we can hear the "voice" of God in the midst of so much noise and other voices.

Through the voice of the times God is asking us different questions, he is putting before us different challenges to solve. There are the big events happening around us in the world (war, global warming, etc.) The God of life is active and present in these vents too.

The small experiences and happenings of our daily life are equally important for discovering the will of God. For example, an illness, a financial problem, a son or

daughter coming with good results from school. There is a message in everything, everything can be a “window” to the God of Life.

Voice in our souls

He speaks to us through the inspirations we experience in our own souls – the breath of the Holy Spirit. This could be, for example, a power longing for something, or a thought that just won’t go away, or we feel that we have to do something. We have to watch here that we are not following our own passions and ideas.

These interior voices can be worries, uneasy feelings.

Voice of Creation

The voice in the soul and the voice speaking to us through the times express the originality of each person and each time. The voice of creation compliments this, because the structure of creation and the order of the way God made the world is stable and has a lasting significance. The structure of creation is also a source for understanding the will of God. If God has made things this way, then that means that he wants things this way

He also speaks us through his creation. The way something is made and exists is also a message from God. God made things in a certain way for a certain purpose. In other words, who we are tells us what we should do.

A New Way to live Faith

What we do with our faith, how we live our faith is so important. Jesus said:

Matthew 7:21

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven".

If we don't get the hang of this we are lost! We need to make the "our Father" a real part of our spiritual journey. Being able to say "Thy will be done.." is firstly of all something that is very deep and inward. I give the Lord the core of my person, of who I am. I give myself to him body, mind and soul. Everything belongs to him, nothing is excluded

It is also something that should last. If we surrender our very selves to the Lord, then it should be forever. It should last. We should also remember that this surrender is a mutual one. Jesus gave himself complete to me.

This is where real holiness begins. Everything else is messing about. We will never change the world with anything less. It means giving our all, with no strings attached to Eternal Love. Then we don't look so much for the consolation of God, but we look for the God of consolation. We seek God himself. We are on a God-Quest. When we take God seriously, then we can expect that God will take us seriously.

Prayer – Making the “Voices” real

How are we going to make all this real? We need to give God some of our time. We need to have a prayer life. People say "I try to pray..." what is it about "trying". Trying is not enough, it is about doing. You don't try – you do if you are serious about anything. You don't try and eat every day – you eat. You don't try and watch TV everyday – you watch. Why? Because it is important to you – you have made it a priority in your life.

Think of the Talks we did last year in February. You are going to hate me for this! I will probably be found dead in a corner after this. But anyway, here goes. Think of one year ago, when we did the Talk on Sharing the Treasure, it was all about passing on the faith to others and becoming instruments, remember? Nah... no one remembers!

Then think back to that point, one year ago. I want you now to think about your life since then – just go through the months. Have you grown spiritually this year? Can you show how you have grown spiritually? Is it something you would notice? Can you show concrete examples of how you have grown spiritually? If you say, well Father, I haven't got any worse – I am about the same as last year, well that means that you haven't grown at all.

What does that mean? It means that your soul is in a “vegetative state”. The light is on, but no one is at home. The wheel is turning, but the hamster’s gone. Elvis has left the building. Part of life is to grow, when you stop growing, you are wasting away. We all have to ask ourselves: “are we growing in the Lord?” Am I more in love with Jesus than I was last year at this time. And can I prove it? Do I feel more loved by Jesus, than I was last year? Can I prove it? If you say, I will try – then it is not going to work.