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Cooperating with God's Will

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My name is Stacey Sumereau. I'm so glad that you've joined me for this session to talk about cooperating with the will of God. So let's begin with a prayer. *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Holy Spirit, You are the source of all grace, life, goodness, creativity. We call upon You to be present here today. We ask You to help us to know God's will, and we ask You to give us the grace to cooperate with it. St. Gabriel, just as you bore the message of salvation to Mary, please ask God for the graces to cooperate with His will, so that we may say yes to all the plans He has in mind for us. Jesus, thank You so much for coming this Christmas. We want You and we want more of You in our lives, in every aspect of our lives. Thank You. Blessed Virgin Mary, pray for us. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Today, we're going to be talking about cooperating with God's will, and we're going to be using the text from Luke where we hear about how the angel Gabriel came to the Blessed Mother and invited her to be the Mother of God. This is a very appropriate reading for this time of Advent. So I just invite you to get a cup of coffee, take some notes, relax, and really enter into this season, because I know it's a busy one. So let's just take a little time to meditate on how we can say yes to God's will.

So, first of all, before the angel Gabriel came, Mary's heart was ready to receive him. And this is one of those areas where I know I need to check my faith and my trust in God, to say "If God sent an angel to me, would I be ready to receive Him?" Would I actually be willing to say "Okay, I'm going to do something crazy for You, God." So take a little moment, give yourself an honesty check, and say "If I were the Blessed Virgin Mary, how would I respond?" And if the answer is "Not like Mary," then it's a good opportunity to take it to prayer.

So first, we hear that Mary was greatly troubled at Gabriel's greeting. I can only imagine how stressful it must have been, and awed, and crazy to have an angel come up to you and say "Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you." And, like, Mary was just... it was like her world was flipped upside down. There are a lot of moments of craziness in our lives where something happens and we're just struggling to figure out how to deal with it. One memory that stands out to me is when I was in the middle of winter, 36 weeks pregnant, and my car slid down a hill that was icy, and I ended up crashing and totaling the car and going into false labor for about eight hours.

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It was one of those moments where I just had no idea what was coming next, I had no idea if my baby was perfectly healthy, my heart was racing - talk about pregnancy hormones just going crazy. And in that moment, what I knew I needed to do was just pray and say “God, be with me here please.” So in any moments of stress and crisis, Mary serves as an amazing model, because what she does is she just listens. She listens to the angel Gabriel. She doesn’t run away. Even though she’s scared, she stays with the angel and listens to what he has to say.

So next, Gabriel tells Mary something that is literally impossible. He says “You will conceive and bear a son.” Now, so often in my life I just operate as if God can only operate within the natural world, right. I just... I act like and I think of God as the kind of God who could only do things within the created world, within the normal sphere of things. And that’s not our God. Our God... we need to not put Him in a box of our own making. Now, that’s not the say that God is necessarily going to work miracles all the time; however, this is a wonderful example of God bringing something that is literally impossible, and a good reminder that God can move mountains.

So it would be sort of like if God was like “Oh yeah, don’t worry about it.” You know, Gabriel says “We’re just going to move the mountain range, we’re just going to take it and put it right over here, and then we’re going to flip the sky upside down, we’re going to pick up this lake and put it over here. Don’t worry about it. The Holy Spirit’s got you covered.” What would you say in your own life if that was God’s will for you?

I know sometimes I get overwhelmed by the enormity of the things that I feel called to, whether that was starting my speaking ministry when I was eight months pregnant, or trying to find friends when I was alone in a new place and I just couldn’t seem to find any friends, and trying to do all these things that seemed impossible. Also, another example is trying to find my spouse. You know, I was on CatholicMatch and I was looking and waiting, and I kept thinking that all these things are impossible. And you know what? God has answered every single one of those prayers when I’ve quieted my heart and turned to Him and said “God, what do You have for me?” So I invite you to take that approach, instead of trying to control things, which is my favorite way to go about things.

So Mary is listening to the angel. She’s listening to this thing that’s impossible. And if I were Mary, I probably would have thought, you know, “Why me? How could I possibly be the Mother of God?” Impostor syndrome is very, very common. It makes you think “Well, I have nothing to offer to the world. It’s all been done before. I might as well not even start, because there’s no way that I could add anything original to the world.” And when you think about it, Mary was

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a common peasant girl. I mean, I'm sure she was very beautiful to look at, and we know that she was perfectly united to God's will, and that she didn't have Original Sin, but still, you'd think He'd pick a queen or someone with a lot of power.

But the beautiful thing about the way our God works is that He chooses intentionally the people who are not powerful, the people who are despised, or rejected, infertile, disabled. We look at Sarah in the bible. She was Abraham's wife, and she became a mother at age 90. She waited a lifetime of infertility before God brought her a son. We look at Joseph, who was sold into slavery and abandoned by his brothers, and God raised him up to be the King of Egypt.

And then we see Moses in the bible as well. Now, we forget often that Moses is actually a murderer - he killed an Egyptian, and then he was kicked out by his own people for many years before he made the most enormous combat and ended up taking his people through the Red Sea and across the desert, all the way to the gates of the promised land. And God intentionally picks these people who are disadvantaged, lowly, rejected, despised, unnoticed, unremarkable, and elevates them to greatness.

So, if you're ever feeling called to something, but you think "That can't possibly be me," I just invite you to take away those barriers in your mind and to just get started. If you feel called to something, you feel like God is inviting you to do some great plan, and you have a dream in your heart that you want to start, go ahead and do it. Don't wait, don't wait 'til tomorrow, just build the first block and see what God has in store for that.

Next in Mary's story, she says the most important part. So Gabriel has given her a mission from God, given her her mission from God, He's invited her to be the mother of the Savior, and Mary simply says "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word." Mary knew that she was not greater than God. She trusted that God's plans for her could make her happier than she could make herself.

I always like to use myself as an example, because I have not been perfect in my life. I know that when I was a teenager and a young adult, I did not want to know what God's plans were for my life. I was much more interested in doing what I wanted to do, which was to be a Broadway actress. So most of my prayers would consist of "Okay God, what do You want?" You know, "I really want to do this thing, so I'm just going to do it, and if You don't want me to do it just send a lightning bolt or something. Okay, bye." And I wouldn't listen for His answer because I was so afraid that maybe His plan for me would be something that I didn't want.

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So, consequently, I went through my teenage years and my young adult years pursuing my own dreams, and they went well, but I was deeply unhappy by the time I was 24, and I realized that my own plans for myself weren't working out in the big sense. That I had called myself to something, instead of being called by God. So I had to backpedal, go back to square one, and it was really difficult. But I started investing in my relationship with God, skipping my auditions and going to daily Mass, and a few months after that I felt called to discern religious life as a nun. Now, this was about the most terrifying thing that I could have imagined, because I had never seen myself in a convent. I guess there was a short phase when I was about 12 where I wanted to be like St. Therese, so I wanted to be a Carmelite nun, but then once I found out what that really entailed I was like "Hmm, no. I think I'm going to do the actress thing." So, going back to God's request and really going to ground zero, starting over, leaving my own dreams and starting from the ground up, I had to really acknowledge and ask myself "Do I trust God's plan." And the answer came back: "No."

So I went to confession, and I was really struggling with this and I confessed it, and the priest gave me on a bookmark the Prayer of Surrendering, and he told me to pray it slowly every day, which I did. This was the most terrifying prayer I have ever said, and what it involved was putting every part of myself, one by one, into God's hands. So I would hand Him my heart, my mind, my imagination, my weaknesses, my sins, my future, my past, my relationships, everything that I wanted, all of the things that I struggled with. And the beauty of this prayer was that it identified specifically where I didn't trust God. So maybe on any given day it would be pretty easy to hand over seven out of every ten things that I said, but there were those three things where I was like "No, I want to hold on to this. Please let me have this control. Like, why do You want to take that as well?"

But if I stand in the truth of who God is, I have to acknowledge that I am His handmaid. He has created me, He knows me better than I know myself, and that what He ultimately desires for me is what I desire as well at the deepest level, which is to give myself away, to be a gift to others. I just had to sort through all of those layers of desire, because what I thought I wanted was what I had pursued for many years, but underneath that was a desire for attention, and underneath that was a desire for love, and underneath that was really what God's will for me is. So, ultimately, praying this Prayer of Surrender for me was life-changing, and I give it away to all the subscribers on my website because I believe in it so much and its ability to identify where we don't trust God.

Ultimately, praying this Prayer of Surrender every single day - which I pray it still many, many days, especially when I'm struggling with something - I imagine putting every single part of myself into God's hands. And what that had the effect

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of doing was leading to a relationship where God could show me the love in His heart for me, where He could show me the depth of His love, the greatness of the plans that He wanted for me. And, ultimately, what it led me to was trust, trust such that I could finally say “God, if You want me to be a nun, I will be.” And, ultimately, He wasn’t calling me to that. But, you know, my discernment of religious life really gave me the spiritual maturity so that I could engage in my vocation as a wife and a mother when I did finally meet my husband. He didn’t waste a single second of any of that time of discernment, and I am so grateful that I just opened myself up. Painful and difficult as it was and as imperfectly as I did, I’m so glad that I opened myself up to the possibility of letting God direct my life.

So, after the angel Gabriel receives Mary’s “Yes,” which I know God would love in this Advent season, to receive your “Yes” as well, he disappears. Poof. The angel departed from her, we read. Mary couldn’t see what was around the next turn. There she was, a pregnant teenager, alone, totally unsure of what she was supposed to do next, and we know that God was going to lead her through a lot of crazy situations. She was going to give birth to Jesus in a farm, she was going to escape into Egypt, getting away by the hair of their teeth I’m sure. Later, 33 years later, she was going to stand at the foot of the cross of her Son, giving Jesus back to God.

At each turn, you know, we look at this whole and story, and we’ve all read it many times before, and it can look like “Oh, yeah, Mary probably knew exactly what was going to happen.” But she didn’t. She was human just like the rest of us. And what it was that ultimately led her to being able to accomplish such great things was her saying yes over and over to God, through all the times when she couldn’t see around the next turn of the road, through all the times where life felt really hard, or scary, or just like everything wasn’t going to work out. And God wants to do that for us, He wants to work things out for us.

So, using the Blessed Mother as our model, let’s strive at every turn in the road when we feel overwhelmed, stressed, unsure of what’s coming next, or maybe just confused, to say yes to God, to say “God, I trust You. Please show me the love in Your heart.” And, ultimately, what we will gain by cooperating with God’s will is a relationship with Him. More than your job, your... any part of your life, your accomplishments, God wants you. He wants to be with you. And so His plan for you is not just an itinerary, it’s a relationship. It’s a relationship with love itself, which is going to start in this life and continue all the way into heaven. So let’s just keep that in mind in this Advent season, that God wants to be with you eternally, and that’s why He’s coming this Christmas. Let’s close in prayer.

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord God, creator of the universe, we invite You into our hearts and our minds. Lord, we surrender every part of ourselves to You. Lord, I surrender my heart, my mind, my memory, my imagination, my body, my sexuality, my weaknesses, my sins. I surrender every part of myself to You. Lord, I give You every relationship I am in, I give You my dreams, I give You my desires. I surrender to You my past and my future, I surrender all my woundedness to You, I surrender to You every part of myself that I'm ashamed of, I surrender to You every accomplishment that I'm proud of. I trust that You will care for others and for me in a perfectly loving way.

Holy Spirit, You are the source of grace, life, peace, joy, goodness, and self-control. Please purify my desires. Blessed Mother, thank you for your "Yes." Thank you for saying yes to God's plan for your life. Now please stand beside us as we strive to say yes to God's plan for ours. Amen. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. May God bless you today and always.