



AN UNEXPECTED
GIFT FROM GOD


Footprints
A PARISH-BASED MINISTRY


RESPECT LIFE
DENVER

AN UNEXPECTED
GIFT FROM GOD



Commentary by
Mary Carmen Lopez Mota, the Sisters of Life
and Footprints Founder Valerie Haas
Copyright © 2022 by Catholic Charities, Denver.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

Editor: Lynn Grandon

Designed by Jamie Duda

Table of Contents

Week 1

The unexpected Gift from God1

Week 2

Who am I? What is my worth?.....11

Week 3

God My Source of Life.....23

Week 4

Lies. (Uncovering the lies or ripping the veil)33

Week 5

Forgiveness. (Letting God be God. Letting go and Letting God.).....47

Week 6

Divine Mercy and Pure Love in action. Healing through the Sacraments57

Week 7

Motherhood- a call and vocation (God's plan for YOU)69

Week 8

Celebration of Life Reception.....79

chapter one

THE UNEXPECTED GIFT FROM GOD

Welcome

Introductions

Names

How Many Weeks Pregnant?

What brought you to the program?

Finish this sentence with one word "I am_____."

Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit,
and fill my heart with your gifts.

Let my love be true
and my charity be
generous. Help me in all
my needs, and grant me
knowledge

to do what is right.

Advise me in my doubts,
strengthen me in my
weakness, protect me when I
am tempted and console me
when I am afraid. Graciously
hear me, O Holy Spirit, and
pour Your light

into my heart, mind and soul.

Help me to live a holy life
and grow in goodness and
grace.

Amen.

The Annunciation

Your faithful companion

Whatever fear or anxieties you may have about your future, you are not alone. There is one woman who desires to share her very similar journey with you. She also had an unexpected pregnancy and was faced with a completely unknown future. Her response to her unexpected pregnancy was initially full of concern and confusion, but as she continued to trust in God's plan, her response continually grew into a deepening source of joy. This woman never lost her sense of beauty and worth. In fact, her beauty blossomed because, through motherhood, she found the deeper meaning of who she was as a woman. This woman's name is Mary.

Our Blessed Mother was a teenager when she was asked to be the Mother of God. Even though she was preserved from original sin, she was still human, she experienced emotions, and had to walk on a journey of faith that was full of surprises and turmoil just like us. But what got her through the journey was her personal relationship with God through prayer.

Prayer is a heart-to-heart dialogue with God. He is always with us and longs to be our best friend, our companion each step of the way. He desires to be the person to whom we run in moments of joy and excitement, and in moments of fear and sadness. Prayer is a conversation with God about all these things.

When praying to God, we do not need to pretend to be anything else than who we are. God wants us to be our real selves with Him. He loves us and meets us right where we are, even when we are covered in sin and shame. He knows our needs before we present them to Him and even before we know about them. He desires to fulfill all our needs. We can be confident in the love of the Father for us by coming to know and rest in the love of Jesus!

God does not want us to be anxious or worried; on the contrary, He wants us to entrust our problems to Him, with faith that He will take care of them like a loving Father would. When we trust Him in this way, we are filled with His peace. St. Paul said:

"Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the

peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phillipians 4:6).

We can learn from Mary’s life how important it is to have a personal relationship with God. But how do we get there? Just like building any other relationship, we need to spend time with God. We truly can spend time with Him anywhere, at any time. However, for an intimate encounter, He waits patiently for us in the Eucharist at every Catholic Church and Adoration Chapel around the world. In addition to spending time with Him in prayer, we come to know God by reading Holy Scripture. God reveals Himself to us in the Bible. For example, He can provide to us the perfect verse or reading at the perfect time. He can also reveal His love and concern for us through sacred music. Like Mary, the more we get to know God through these encounters, the more we will long to spend more time with Him. It is in knowing Him that our trust in Him grows and we can trust in His plan for our lives.

Surrendering to God may sound scary at first, but it does not mean that we need to give up our dreams or who we are to be faithful to His plan for our lives. We may be afraid of what He might ask of us, or where His plans may lead us. The beautiful part is that our fear is not a surprise to God. When Mary said, “Let it be done”, she trusted in God based on her knowledge of His infinite and perfect love for her. While she might have altered some of her plans, Mary said “yes” to an even better plan, even though she didn’t know what the future held. She was able to say yes because she knew that God loved her and wanted the best for her. Like Mary, the more that we know Him through prayer and personal encounters, the more we will fall in love with Him and will be able to trust and rest in His love. We will become anchored in God, where no storm will move us away from Him.

A good starting point in developing a personal relationship with God, or to deepen the one that we already have, might be asking Him to meet us right where we are, here and now. We simply ask Him to help us in this exact moment, in the exact physical place we are seated now, in the exact time we are now, with those who are surrounding us exactly at this time- and ask for the graces to move forward with courage.



We can also start our relationship with God by asking Him to help us open our hearts to Him. We ask Him to open our spiritual eyes, so that we can see His loving care and presence in our lives, or for the grace to start trusting in Him to the point of our total abandonment in His loving arms. Because of His goodness, He pours grace into our hearts at the first moment of our openness to receive it.

Mary, our spiritual mother and cheerleader in Heaven, is always attentive to our needs and promptly intercedes for us. She always leads us to Jesus. Mary is our role model to follow as a woman, friend, daughter, and mother as we begin our individual journey toward a trusting relationship with God.

Mary's fiat and trust in God

In the Annunciation we see that Mary gave her “yes”, or her fiat, to God on the day the angel Gabriel visited her. Her complete trust in Him allowed her to surrender herself without reservation to His will and His plans for her life. However, she had to continue to renew her fiat to God. This means that Mary lived in total surrender one day at a time; this allowed her to have a hopeful view about the future. She needed to walk by faith and not by sight, just like all of us are called to do. Although she might not have physically seen Him, through the gift of grace, she believed and knew God was with her all along the way, and this is what gave her strength.

Here and now is where God’s grace abounds for you! Just like the child within you grows each day, so can you grow spiritually every day—very gently and at your own rhythm. God will gently transform your heart and mind and give you the grace and ability to say “yes” to what is presented to you at every moment.

Emotions

Mary experienced very real emotions, especially in her teen years. Even though she was perfect and conceived without sin, she was “greatly troubled” (Luke 1:29) after the angel Gabriel’s announcement of being chosen by God to be the Mother of His Son. Feeling troubled when facing unexpected, unfamiliar or challenging circumstances is a natural human response. Most important is how we react to those emotions. It is comforting to see that Mary was a woman who experienced the same kind of confusion and awe that we do. This should encourage us to ask her for advice and to imitate her trust in God. An important fact that we must remember is that God did not leave Mary on her own with her array of emotions. He comforted her.

Real Life

Yes, that was Mary, but what about the rest of us?

One of the first thoughts that often come to a woman when she finds out about an unexpected pregnancy is, "My life is over!" The sudden intrusion of motherhood seems like a complete loss of control over her present and future self. As humans, we like to have as much control over our lives as we can. But by using Mary's example, if we strive to surrender to God's Will, trusting that He has our best interest in mind, we can find peace and hope amidst these changes.

God never leaves us alone. He longs to be our personal companion, anchor and defender. He is the friend looking forward to partaking in our everyday experiences, whether they are simple joys, or complex concerns. He offers to walk alongside us. As the prophet Isaiah says:

"For I am the Lord, your God, who grasps your right hand; It is I who say to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'" (Isaiah 41:13)

From the moment we were created, our lives have been a gift from God and belong to Him. God cares for everything that is His. When Mary said "yes" to bear the Son of God, He guided Mary so that she could continue the journey of her life through a new perspective and adventure. Our "yes" allows us to become more fully ourselves, even during a difficult situation or our suffering. God's plans are simply more amazing and freeing than we could ever imagine on our own. God's will for our lives doesn't intend suffering. He allows certain things to occur that can be used to bring about an even greater good. An example would be the Crucifixion, which led to the Resurrection. When we say "yes" to God, we are given the opportunity to experience something beautiful and exciting, even when we do not know every detail of the journey.

A pregnancy, even an unexpected one, brings new life, new purpose, and new meaning to our existence. It is an unexpected gift from God.

God does not make mistakes and He uses every circumstance, even the ones that might look unfavorable to us, as opportunities to bless us. The following bible verse is a wonderful reminder of this:

“For I know the plans that I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Just like it is true that God is for us and with us, Satan is against us. He unceasingly distracts us from following God’s perfect plan for our lives. This means that we need to know who we belong to and the power of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. When Jesus died for us, He purchased us as His children and He defeated Satan. Because of our new identity as redeemed children of God, we have authority over the kingdom of darkness where Satan rules. By pronouncing the name of Jesus out loud when we feel overwhelmed or anxious, we call upon God’s victory and favor.

It is a good idea to begin practicing the healthy habit of praying for protection. As it was mentioned earlier, we become particularly attractive to Satan when we want to grow closer to Christ and when we seek what is good, true and beautiful in God’s eyes.

The prayer for protection to Saint Michael the Archangel is a simple way to create this new habit and a powerful way to begin every day. Let’s recite the following prayer together...

Prayer to Saint Michael

by Pope Leo XIII

Saint Michael, the Archangel, defend us in battle;
be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou,
O prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan, and all the other evil spirits,
who prowl throughout the world, seeking the ruin of souls.
Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. Reflecting on Mary's human nature, how can you relate to her and her reaction to the Angel Gabriel's announcement? What are your emotions as you contemplate the scene of the Annunciation?
2. What does it mean to you that God is always with you? Is there a certain place or time where you have felt the presence of God?
3. How does your knowledge of Mary's experience and reaction to The Unexpected Gift from God affect your perception of your current circumstances?

Spiritual Exercise

Present each participant with a journal.

Find a quiet time to spend with Jesus every day. Perhaps in the morning after waking up, during a lunch break at school or work, or at night before going to bed. Sit quietly, meeting Jesus in your heart. Open a Bible and prayerfully read a few passages...truly listen as if Jesus is whispering the words into your heart. Or softly play Christian music and reflect on the words of the songs. What is Jesus' message just for you?

Keep a journal with you so that you can write down your conversation with Jesus. This gives you the ability to go back and remind yourself of God's providence and mercy in the moments when you might feel overwhelmed or anxious. It's okay to be honest with God about how you are feeling!

Finally, do not forget to pray for one another throughout the week!

Closing Prayer

Listen to the words of the following poem as the facilitator slowly reads it.

Place yourself within the poem, alongside our precious Lord.

Footprints in the Sand

One night I had a dream. I was walking along the
beach with the Lord, and across the skies
flashed scenes from my life.

In each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the
sand. One was mine, and one was the Lord's.

When the last scene of my life appeared before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand, and,
to my surprise, I noticed that many times
along the path of my life there was only
one set of footprints.

And I noticed that I was at the lowest and saddest times in my life.
I asked the Lord about it: "Lord, You said that once I decided to follow You,
You would walk with me all the way.

But I notice that during the most troublesome times in my life
there is only one set of footprints.

I don't understand why You left my side when I needed You most."

The Lord said: "My precious child,
I never left you during your time of trial.
Where you see only one set of footprints,
I was carrying you."

Ending Activity

Participants listen to the song, "Oceans" by Hillsong. During or after the song, each participant writes her concerns and petitions to God and places them in a prayer box provided by the leader. Then, the leader leads the group in prayer and presents the contents of the prayer box to our Merciful and Loving God.