

Your Best Yes
Week 1 December 2nd 2018
Discernment

Welcome to the first Sunday of Advent and our new message series call "Your Best Yes". Now many people just skip Advent completely and go right to Christmas. WNIC has been playing Christmas music 24/7 since Halloween. Our tv's are filled with the Christmas messages that we need this or that.

And that reminds me of a story: A little boy was writing a Christmas letter, not to Santa, but to Jesus. I guess he figured he could cut out the middle man and go right to the top! Anyway he writes, I've been good all year long and I deserve a new bike. He stops, looks at it and crosses out all year long and replaces it with most of the year. He thinks some more and then replaces that with I've been pretty good this past month.

Finally, in frustration he goes over to the manger and takes the figure of Mary and hides it in his bedroom. He goes back to the letter and writes, Dear baby Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother.....

The point is, Christmas is pretty much here, complete with all the hustle and bustle. The next month will probably be the busiest time of the whole year.

Some of us thrive on all this uproar and busyness and others, not so much. I like to go to the mall with my hot chocolate a few days before Christmas and just watch all the activity.

At this time of year, we all have limited time to do all the things we think we should be doing.

We have those get-togethers, the Christmas concerts, the school pageants... it's all good. It just doesn't all fit. We are busy.

We have to attend to things like school studies or our careers. We have little children to look after or aging parents to care for. And life isn't put on hold just because the holidays are here.

It's all good. It means we're blessed with family, and friends and opportunities, but it's a problem nonetheless.

All these good things can start feeling like pressure, and sometimes it can become oppressive, and even overwhelming.

But we don't have to get anxious, angry or annoyed. Our lives tend to be all about options and choices that just keep coming our way.

And what we do with those choices will determine the quality and direction of our lives.

So, I think we could use a good strategy; a plan for the holidays; a plan that we can use for the whole of our lives, not just at Christmas time.

St. Ignatius had a strategy for life. He called it discernment. Discernment is about judgment and decision-making. But it is more than that. Discernment is not just recognizing the good from the bad, but the good from the greatest good.

When life presents more than one option, discernment is about finding the best one, the one that will do the most good. And I think we find the best option is always the one that is God's will for us.

And so when facing our daily choices, do we consider the greatest good before God? In that sense, discernment is a process of spiritual decision-making.

Throughout the course of this series, we are going to emphasize three principles that have to do with discernment.

The first one is to ***discern the truth that is God***. And the truth is, God wants what is best for us. He wants to guide us in our decision-making.

He wants us to enjoy every day of our lives and to see life as his gift to us. We will find our best yes when we invite God to be a part of all aspects of our lives.

In order to lay out our options before Him and actually take the time to hear what he has to say, we need daily quiet time, that's DAILY quiet time. The best way to find quiet time is to turn off all our devices and set aside some time each and every day to listen to the voice of God.

The second principle is this. We need to ***discern the truth that is ourselves***; to discover who we really are. We can easily forget our identity; our giftedness, the fact that we are God's beloved ones, His beloved children.

Discernment is asking God what we should do based upon who he has made us as individuals, and then choosing the best path.

Now that doesn't mean that we don't have obligations that we must fulfill. We will make sacrifices this Christmas because we have obligations to family, friends or co-workers. These are things that we choose to do.

We choose to say, "Yes," just like we can choose to say, "No." And we can say, "No." It could become a very powerful word for us this Christmas.

If you are a parent, then you are aware that saying "No" can be a reflection of love.

And so we can say "No" to over-scheduling ourselves and our families. We can say, "No," to much of the craziness that happens at this time of year. The best, "Yes," is often preceded by a firm, "No." And it's hard sometimes to say that because we want to please everyone. It's not wrong to want to please everyone. It's not wrong. It's just impossible.

Ignatius teaches us a **third principle**, and it's reflected in today's second reading from St. Paul to the Thessalonians. Paul writes,

¹³And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

1 Thessalonians 3: 13

Paul prays for his friends, that they will increase and abound in love. Our best yes, our greatest good will ultimately come from love and the desire to love.

Spiritual discernment is based on love. So the third principle of discernment that we're going to look at is our need to ***discern from the truth that is love***.

And we need to enter into the season of Advent, and then Christmas, with a true sense of love; in spite of the crowds, the pressure, the obligations and the money that we mistakenly think we have to spend.

How can we show others how much we love them? What is the true measure of love? How does our love for others reflect the love of Jesus for us?

Over the next few weeks, we are going to be looking at that. We are going to look at how we can grow to love God, to love others, and, inspired by that love, to make disciples through spiritual discipleship.

Next week, we are going to begin by talking about growing in love toward God.

In two weeks, we are going to look at loving others. It's all about sharing what we have with those who don't.

There is nothing wrong with having nice things, they are a gift from God. But we must remember those who need our generosity and make them a priority also.

In addition, there will be an opportunity to reach out to others from another country. Ever had a life-changing experience? Well, Fr Gary will talk about an opportunity to consider one in week 3.

And, we'll also be looking at how we can reach out to our unconnected friends and family by inviting them to our Christmas celebration of the Eucharist.

We are called this time of year to prepare the way of the Lord. Luke tells us in today's Gospel:

³⁴ ***“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly,***

Luke 21: 34

Be prepared, prepare the way of the Lord. Seek the path of peace; peace of mind and peace in our hearts this Christmas. Let God show us the way to His peace.

This time of year is going to be busy, but it can be busy without worries, and anger, and anxiousness. Give God the gift of your best yes and invite Him into your busyness; your struggles; your joys; your grief; your brokenness; invite Him into everything this Christmas.