

Your high school graduation picture, the family vacation photographs, the fifth grade class photo. Once upon a time you were a smiling toddler. Do you remember your youngest days? The baby boy your family members held. In photographs like these, your life's progression is not only revealed but it also makes you wonder of God's plans for your life then and now, mysteriously and marvelously at work.

Saint John Paul II and Saint John XXIII: when we see pictures of them as young men, they didn't know what they would become. But God had a plan for them; he knew their souls better than they could understand. Each man fulfilled his life's destiny because both were led by God's will. They sought it and found it, and then were obedient to it, ever open to what God asked. Each came to recognize God's plan not only for his life but for the world ever more clearly.

For one of my classes, there is a book I'm reading called *He Leadeth Me* by Father Walter Ciznek. He details his spiritual journey while being imprisoned in Soviet Russia for twenty three agonizing years, mostly in the forced labor camps of Siberia. The book's message is to let go of your will and seek God's will, and follow wherever it takes you and accept with a grace that believes in God's providence, true love and wisdom. The testimony offered stretched the limits of what I thought and challenged how I live now; uprooting the comforts I had accustomed myself to. I was realizing in my selfishness that I had never given so much thought as to God's will. I saw my will and whatever I wanted as God's will. I expected and was desiring of God to somehow conform to my will: to help me fulfill my dreams. When I read those pages everything was turned upside down. It was my will that needed to conform to God's will. My heart dropped when I realized that, reflecting the growth I so needed in trusting God, but it was also relieved of an enormous weight. I was unknowingly imprisoned by my own will, unable to see how I was held hostage by the limits of myself and the uncertainties I thought I could solve.

The truth is that God has plans we don't have for ourselves. Saint John Paul II believed this life to be a drama of redemption and salvation where every scene matters and every person is a unique character with a role to play. He stressed how everything has a purpose in God's ultimate plan. He once said "In the designs of providence, there are no mere coincidences."

In his young life, Karol Josef Wojtyla thought of having a career in theatre. He discerned though God's will for him to be a priest, which eventually led him to become Saint John Paul II. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli entered the seminary early on at age twelve, and after becoming the cardinal patriarch of Venice, he was prepared to spend the rest of his life there. But God had other plans, and moved him to Rome at age seventy seven to become Pope, and now he is Saint John XXIII.

To cooperate with God and be open to His plans, to follow His will in everything is beyond difficult. It is the challenge of this life; to give yourself fully to God while facing sin and the root of it all: pride. One has to courageously surrender everything and trust ultimately in God's all-encompassing love. The fears of doing this are nothing compared with what God sees in you as his son. The plans he has for you are greater than the plans you have for yourself, and that if you live by God's will your life can be fulfilled.

A great lesson in the lives of the saints then, which we were reminded of this weekend, is how every one of them eventually conformed his or her will to God's will. And He led them.

So when we look back on old pictures, those of our younger selves and even the here and now, we can trust and remember that God has a plan. It was at work and it continues to be at work. Whether it is fulfilled is up to you. In the simple profoundness of the Lord's Prayer, we say "Our Father... Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And when we do this, we find that God's will reveals everything.