



Chapter 6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3: 5-6

God's timing is always perfect. He chose to introduce me to "His Special Someone" at the moment I would be most receptive, although at the time, I did not realize it. This stumbling block became my stepping stone...

The Stoplight

God did amazing things in and through the ten-day fast—things that can be described as none other than life-changing. He had my full attention now and He kept it in the most tender of ways. My heart, soul, mind, and body were held voluntarily captive by a God so loving, so gracious, and so powerful. How could I dare glance away, even for a moment? For the first time in my life I felt as if He was truly in control, and it was an “out of this world” feeling. It is, however, with a bit of hesitation that I write what happened next.

At the end of the fast, I was not only elated that *We* had made it, but a bit sad that the fast had ended. I had reached a state of euphoria, feeling like a balloon barely tied to this earth. I thought that, if the tiny string broke, I would just float off into heaven.

On the very last day, I was to go for one of the series of Catechism classes that my spiritual director, Fr. Michael, had arranged for my friends and me. The topic was Mary, and I was not really looking forward to it. As a Protestant, revelation about Mary was the Church teaching I found most difficult to accept. The timing, of course, was heaven-sent. Due to the fast, I was now

wide-open spiritually, as if God had taken celestial pliers and pried off the lid to the jar of my soul. It had been super-glued on for so long that only an act of extreme grace could move it, but “POP!”—off it had finally come. The stronghold of “*self-control*” had been swallowed up by “*God-control*.”

I drove, very carefully I might add, to my class. The only thing I was looking forward to was telling Fr. Michael about the stupendous things God was doing for me. Instead, after a quick handshake, my classmates and I sat down immediately, and Fr. Michael began his teaching on the Blessed Mother. I listened as best I could.

He began with the fact that Mary is called “Mother of God.” “What a funny name,” I thought. But he explained that because we believe the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, though unique in their own identity, are also one, she could be called this. I understood his explanation, but it felt a bit funny, and I resolved to pray for God to open my heart to embrace this title more fully. I lingered on this a moment and concluded that this was really just a different way of looking at the relationship between Mary and God. I could see it was truth. She did give birth to Jesus, so it did make her “Mother of God” as well as “Mother of Jesus.” Okay, so far so good.

“Ever Virgin” was the next title Fr. Michael explained. Roman Catholics believe that the Blessed Mother was not only a virgin when she conceived Jesus, but after she gave birth as well. I had heard one wise, old sage explain it “like sunlight streaming through glass, this is how the Virgin painlessly delivered Jesus and kept her virginity.” I had been taught that Jesus had brothers and

sisters, born to Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus, but Fr. Michael explained that, in the Bible, “brother and sister” are used also for close kin. Okay, I could see that. And I could even grasp the teaching that, since she had remained a virgin at conception, why could the same not be true *after* giving birth? I did believe that God could do anything, so why not this?

He then went on to explain that Mary intercedes for us from heaven. She had been taken up into heaven after her time on earth was finished, he explained. “Hmmm... well, she was not the only person in the Bible that had been whisked straight to heaven. There were Moses and Elijah, so why not Jesus’ own Mother?” I thought.

Fr. Michael explained that, if we ask the saints to pray for us, they go directly to Jesus on our behalf, just as if we had asked a devout friend to pray for us about an issue. The only difference between saints and our friends on earth is that saints, like Mary, are now in heaven and closer to God and the ways and will of God, and therefore they make great advocates for us before Jesus and the Heavenly Father. Okay, I could understand that, too.

I had been doing so well, nodding in agreement silently to myself about all Fr. Michael was teaching us. But, just as with the email I had received at the start of the fast, I was blown out of the water by the next comment...

Fr. Michael began to explain that Mary was our best advocate because she was Jesus' Mother, (and who can say "No" to his Mother?) and because she had been *preserved from original sin in her Immaculate Conception. She was sinless...*

Whoa! That was it. I was finished! I absolutely could not embrace this teaching, not even if I had fasted for ten thousand years, I thought. All of my hopes and dreams of entering the Church just flew right out the window. I had hoped it would be my soul that took flight, since I had felt so buoyed by my fasting experience with God, but now, I felt totally deflated. It was as if this one comment was a tiny dart that struck my ballooned spirit and left me flat on the floor.

I spoke up and, with all sincerity, voiced my very contrary opinion: "I am afraid I am just fine with thinking of Mary as a sinful person, just like I am, who was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Someone so much bigger than herself, just like I am supposed to do." And at that point my ears and mind closed off, and I went inward to mourn the loss of all I had thought the Lord was calling me to be.

I began to recall what God had shown me during the fast—a very short and to-the-point-parable that was churned up again and again and again... in the funniest and strangest of places: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field" (Matthew 13:34).

It had been so applicable to me until now. I was that guy! I had found The Treasure! It had been shown to me so clearly. The Eucharist! It was Him! Truly Jesus! He was my Pearl of Great Price! I was overjoyed! And I was beginning to feel I was to sell *everything* in order to buy the field and gain it. But this...? Oh my, how could I? Surely God did not intend for *this* to be a part of all that I was to “acquire.”

As I sat in the class, not hearing another word he said, I kept thinking, “Catholicism is a *huge* field I am going to have to buy into with *lots of things* that I don’t really want or understand. I am wondering if I could just sell off the parts I don’t want, and keep the parts I do want!?! How on earth can I say ‘Amen’ to this?”

As I mentioned earlier, I believe that Fr. Michael noticed my disappointment. After class, he took me aside to ask what was wrong. I began to tell him about my irreconcilable struggle with this teaching. And then he said something that ignited a small glimmer of hope. He introduced the *Law of Graduality* which, as explained earlier, states that, if there is a teaching in the Church that you cannot grasp or accept at the present time, if you are willing to stay open to God showing you the truth about it, you can still become a Catholic.

This was heavy teaching. It was frightening to me for reasons I could not explain. My world was turning upside down as I was beginning to see that there was probably a great deal more in the “field” of the Church that I would need to unearth over time. How could I take a leap of faith and buy the field, not knowing what lay beneath the surface of it all?

Fr. Michael assured me that there were great heaps of treasure, if I would only continue to be open to the Spirit and keep digging. He said God would show me more new things every day, but I had to resist closing the door and saying, “I could *NEVER* believe that.” I needed to say, “Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief.”

I left the class much weightier than when I arrived. To make myself feel better, I decided to do what I had always done—to go shopping and to do it in a big way, as this was a BIG problem. Even though God had filled me with Himself so beautifully for the last few days, once my eyes were off of Him and onto my problems, I only remembered the former ways I used to make myself feel safe, secure, and loved. I would buy all that I had been missing for the past ten days—and do it in bulk.

As I drove to Costco, I was replaying in my mind the conversations and discussions in the class. I was thinking about how I felt about Mary and all that I had been taught to be true. I was asking God to help me. I was heartbroken and confused. I wanted Jesus so badly. I wanted Him in the Eucharist. But now this! To get to Him I would have to get past His Mother! Could I? I truly wanted to. I wanted to know the Truth and let the Truth set me free, but I was not sure of what Truth was. I began to pray, “Lord, show me the Truth. What is the Truth?”

As I came to a stoplight that was just like any other stoplight, I pulled up and, as I was the first car in the line of traffic, I gazed upward at it, so as not to delay when the light turned green. And

then... there she was! I thought I must be seeing things. I squinted and thought, “What on earth?!” But I knew who she was the second I saw her. She was about seventeen and appeared very kind and sweet. She had on a brown dress and a blue mantle over her brown hair. She had a huge smile and her brown eyes sparkled as she spoke.

She simply said, “Don’t let issues you have with me, keep you from my Son.” And then she disappeared.

I was stunned—absolutely speechless. I began to shake and pulled over as soon as the light turned green. I sat on the side of the road crying. I was overwhelmed by it all—God’s grace and goodness during my fast and now this. Composing myself, I called Fr. Michael. At first, I did not want to tell him all that had transpired since I had last seen him, only a few minutes ago. I thought he would think I had at last lost my mind, or dismiss me for having too vivid an imagination, but he did not. He was kind and gentle and said something that made me feel so loved by God, not doubting my experience, but verifying it.

He said, “Oh Melissa, you are like Jesus’ beloved disciple at the foot of the cross. He is giving you what He loves the most, His Mother.”

Praise Mother of God, thank you for speaking to me! “Don’t let issues you have with me, keep you from my Son.”

Prayer: Dear Father, I have no idea what you may be up to. All I know is that You are all Good and all Truth. Please help me to be able to pray through all of my closed-mindedness—the red lights that stop my journey to You. Please change them into nothing but green, even the parts I most misunderstand and fear.

Promise: “His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever He tells you.’” John 2:5

Proof of the Promise: I have learned that God can take our smallest effort of reaching out in limited faith, and use it for His great glory and our great gain if we are seeking Him with a pure heart. He will meet us where we are and bring us along closer to Him, if we remain open and stay close. The very humble Blessed Mother is always all about Jesus, and pointing us to follow after Him, we need not fear. We need to continue to pray for a pure, open and hungry heart for Him. And we must not let ANYTHING keep us from her Son, not her, not anyone... but most importantly not even ourselves.

Ponder: Journal here about how you feel about the Blessed Virgin Mary. Do you feel she is in competition with Jesus? Do you feel that she is our mother too? Do you have issues with her? Do you love her? Perhaps ask God to give you the same heart towards His mother, that He has...