



## Chapter 2

*“There is not a single moment when God is not communicating himself to us. Most of what occurs in our lives seems to happen accidentally and at random. Now and then God reveals his presence. At times we see the thread and we thank him, but he is always there; everything speaks*

*of him.*” --*Wilfrid Stinissen, Into Your Hands, Father- Abandoning Ourselves to the God Who Loves Us,*” pg 23.

The Lord is always calling us to a new encounter, but at times it can be so hard to hear Him. Often I am deafened by internal struggles, like my preconceived notions or my childhood training, and sometimes life itself just throws me for a loop, and I can't think of anything else but the situation at hand and the trials that it brings. But then, He comes... the Word speaks to my hurting, perplexed heart, and because of or in spite of the stress, anxiety or pain, I listen...

## **Seeking**

In late 2001, the world was recovering from the aftermath of 9-11, and a group of my friends were, in their own way, waging a personal war on terrorism of the most intimate kind. The name of this terrorist was very familiar and continues to destroy many thousands of lives yearly. Cancer. The enemy. It hit my three friends hard, and its initial onslaught left shaken children wondering if their mothers would recover, and husbands weary to the bone. I felt the Lord calling me to help them in some way. He seemed to want to reach out to them through me. I felt totally ill prepared to help.

I had come a long way in my beliefs about prayer. I knew that God still worked in miraculous ways through it, even today. About that time, I was introduced to the Order of Saint Luke, a

healing prayer ministry. This set my friends and me on a mission--to pray and look for “gifted healers” with the hope of finding a cure for them. By God’s grace, we encountered many beautifully anointed souls. I saw first-hand that something good always happens when we pray. My friends’ lives were miraculously sustained for a short while. Peace would wash over us like transparent, supernatural waves that buoyed and transported our souls, renewing, refreshing, and sustaining us. But sadly, ultimately, as will be the case for every life, my three friends passed on to the next realm, each carried off by a final wave of peace, like a boat setting sail for another shore. All three were Catholic.

My friend Joannie was numbered among those ladies and she was one of the holiest souls I had ever known. She was so sure of her faith. She was also equally confident about the power of the sacraments to draw us to God. As we would travel from one healing prayer center to the next, she would lie on her bed at night and read to me. She would say, “Melissa, you know that the Eucharist really *is* the Body and Blood of Christ, or He would never have said so!” I could not argue. She knew I believed the Bible—cover-to-cover, and she drew my attention to John 6:48-66, a passage about the Eucharist. She argued that Jesus was not speaking figuratively when He called Himself the Bread of Life and urged us to eat His Body. Many of His disciples left Him, she reminded me, because “This is a difficult statement, Who can listen to it?”

I had to decide. Was Jesus speaking the truth, and was I going to believe Him...or not? She was so emphatic. Again and again she would read it to me. “Listen,” she would say, “Listen again!” and away she would go reading it to me. Finally I said, “Yes, Joannie! I do believe that the

Eucharist is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, but maybe not quite like you do!” I honestly was not exactly sure what I believed, but I did know this: in the healing ministry, the Eucharist is held in very high esteem. I could not deny what I had seen at these services and Masses, and I knew that there was much more to the Eucharist than I could explain.

On June 14, 2003, I received terrible news as I was on my way to a beloved retreat center in Leakey, Texas, to drop off my daughters at a Christian camp. My girls and I had stopped for lunch in a very tiny bend in the road called Comfort, and it was there, in such a sweetly named rock-hewn Texas town, that I heard that Joannie had passed away. What came to my head was the verse, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles...For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Words I so desperately needed to hear right then. I managed to get back to DC for the funeral and return to the retreat center, but I was so distraught by her death that I had trouble functioning. I could not believe that she was gone. She was so holy that I honestly wondered if she would come back from the dead at her funeral. It was that hard to accept her death. She was so passionate, so on fire. How could it be? How could she be gone?

Joanie’s words, “It really is Him!” kept haunting me.

Could what she had said about the Eucharist actually be true? I had too many questions swirling around in my head while the deep, deep sorrow of losing a beloved friend ached in my bones.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 1:3-5

Graciously, for the next two weeks, the Lord allowed me to be placed at the retreat center deep in the heart of the canyon. Like Moses, I felt safely tucked away, hidden in the cleft of the Rock. (Exodus 33:22) I was swaddled by prayerful people who were so lovingly supporting me. But, in spite of genuine concern and a profuse abundance of wisdom, no one was able to give me the answer to the question Joanie left behind.

Finally, in absolute desperation, I decided to take my trouble, my questions, my doubts, and my fears directly to God. I decided to put Him to the test as I never had before. I resolved to see if He would answer me, as He had so many others in the Bible, if I asked with a very sincere and earnest heart. At the risk of being presumptuous, I reasoned, “If *they* had heard from God, why not me, too?”

My courage came from the fact that I had read the Bible many times, and one of the things I so loved about it was the very humanness of its characters. All are flawed people with real problems, real stories, and real lives. If God would stoop so low as to speak to them, would He, in fact, humble Himself to speak to me? I would never know unless I asked. And so I did.

I packed a water bottle and I hit the trail. Up, up, up the canyon I went, higher and higher with each step. The cedar tree droppings and the chalky limestone rocks covered the path and low scrubby bushes led the way. Finally, I came to a nice clearing where I could see over the canyon edge down to the river below. I sat on a large, rough, lichen-covered rock. Once I settled in, I



very boldly and resolutely told God that I would not move until He answered me, once and for all, about the Eucharist.

What a state I was in as I sat there! I hadn't been able to sleep, and felt as if God had been keeping me awake at night to ponder all that Joannie had told me. I was exhausted from grief and I knew that when I returned home, I would have to face my other two heroic but dying friends—one already in hospice. I was near my breaking point. I felt that I needed to stop “wasting valuable energy” on a question only God could answer. I had read and read until I could read no more about the Eucharist and sacraments. The Christian Churches, represented by brilliant and well-meaning men and women, could not agree on what the Eucharist is exactly or how it comes into being. There were as many answers as there were denominations. What to do? Who to believe? So there I waited, perched upon my rock, for The Ancient of Days to speak to me, a mere nothing, lowly and miserable, desperately seeking the answer to what I believed to be life's greatest question.

In the most reverential way, I stated my purpose. “Dear Lord, here I sit. You know that I try to love You with all of my heart as best I can. And You have all knowledge and understanding, and so it comes as no surprise to You that I long to be enlightened, as strange as it sounds, as to whether You really do come to earth, as my dear friend said, in the form of a *cracker*. And, if You do, You are aware that I do not want to miss one single crumb of You while I am alive on this planet. But if this is wrong, please, I beg You, please, please let me know now and set me free from this obsession.”

I waited. Nothing. I waited and waited. Still nothing. It seemed like days, but I know it was only hours. I began to doubt everything, most of all myself, for being so stupid for putting God to this foolish test. But I had nothing to lose at this point, and nothing left to give to this endeavor but my patient suffering. I longed for Him to answer me.

Eventually, my intellectual curiosity was spent; my emotional well, wept dry; my physical energy exhausted; my spiritual interior, at a point of utter and complete bankruptcy. I was at the rock-bottom seabed of my soul and I needed an answer in order to have the will to push back to the surface for air. I pleaded again, “Lord, I am most sincere. You are aware that I am absolutely distraught and do not want to go on living if I am missing any part of You in any way! If I am to experience You like this, please, please reveal Yourself to me and answer.” And then, honestly, much to my great astonishment, He did.

“Get up.” I heard. I was not sure if this voice was audible or in my inner spirit. I obeyed, scrambling off of my rock, hurriedly uncrossing my legs, which had fallen asleep, and were now speckled with small purplish dots where tiny sharp pebbles had left their imprint on my ankle bones. Blood rushed back into my limbs making them tingle and buzz all the more.

“Now, look over the canyon’s edge.” At this point, I was wondering if He would ask me to jump! Much to my great relief He simply said, “Look and see how beautiful it is.”

“Yes, Lord, it is beautiful.”

“No! Really look at how beautiful this is. Look at the water, the trees, the sky, and the birds.”

“Yes, Lord, I see.”

“No! Really look! Look at the canyon and the clouds and rocks and the colors. Look and see all I have created.”

“Yes, Lord, I see. It is beyond anything man could do.”

And what came next made me know that this was not an imaginary conversation. What He was about to say was nothing I could have ever thought of by myself. It was such a surprise!

“What you see that is so beautiful, is all fallen!” Then He asked me a question.

“Do you think anything or anyone in this fallen world could receive Me except by my grace?”

“No, Lord, I do not.”

“Well then, no man can give to you what only I can give to you, and no man can keep from you what only I can give you.”

“Okay, Lord. If that is true, please give to me Yourself now.” And He did.

It was a most beautiful experience of Love and Light. I was completely enveloped in peace, and His presence flooded my heart, mind, and soul as never before. I am not sure how long it lasted, but in this experience I was given a beautiful picture. It was a three-paneled altarpiece, a triptych. In the center panel was a chalice, the Eucharistic cup being held up by priestly hands, and above it was the Host, broken and blessed, as when the priest holds it up during the Mass and says, “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him Who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.” Only it was not a picture—it was more like a window—and I was witnessing it eternally live. I felt like all time, history, present and future collapsed into this one moment.



On the panel to the right was the Crucifixion. It was Christ, not a picture of Christ, but Christ, on the cross, broken and bleeding in agonizing pain, for me. He said nothing. He only looked at me—no, more like *in* me. I will never forget His look of love. I could not breath. My Savior, there, for me? To say that I felt unworthy of the sacrifice is beyond telling. No human language has strong enough words to express this. It was as if there had been a huge mistake. I knew that it was me that was supposed to be there-- not Him...yet there He hung. It left me sick with love, humbled and eternally thankful.

The third panel to the left was even more curious, as it was a window into the Church. It was as if I were standing at the altar looking into the congregation, into pew after pew of familiar faces—all in row after row, nothing but a sea of people, all staring forward at me, some blinking, some smiling, dressed in their Sunday best--ready to hear me speak, only no words came out. Then above the triptych, these words came blazing and on fire, like gold coming out of a crucible, molten hot then cooling to brightest gold: “This is My Body, broken for you.” And below, “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

I awoke. There I lay in a soft nest of cedar needles. I had absolute peace. I will tell you, I had no idea what had happened. All I knew was that, for the first time in a long time, the agonizing gnawing at my soul was quieted. I did not know the answer still. It would take years to process all that I had just experienced. But I knew Who had the answers and I knew that there was a great deal more I would need to discover and experience about the God of grace Who had so graciously answered me.

**Praise:** Thank You Lord that You showed me, “This is My Body broken for you...”

**Prayer:** Lord, please open my heart and reveal Yourself to me, speak to me so that I can know Who You are, that You are near and that You love me, even in my miserable state. Reveal Yourself to me in any of a thousand different ways in which You speak daily to all. Let me experience You specifically, in the Eucharist, through Your Son in prayer, in Your Sacred Word, and through Your Body, the Church.

**Promise:** “You shall seek me. And you will find me, when you have sought me with your whole heart,” Jeremiah 29:13

**Proof of the Promise:** Ultimately, only God can reveal Himself to us. I have learned that the Lord shows Himself to those who pray for the grace of an open heart and a sincere spirit. If we have a desire to know Him, it is because He Himself has put it there in the first place. He will be found, if we keep seeking.

**Ponder: Journal here** a conversation you would like to have with God asking Him for the grace to be a seeker: to want to know and trust Him more. Ask Him for the grace to make you hungry for the things of Him, giving you an open heart to receive Him in new ways. If you have fears or hesitations about knowing Him more deeply -- if you’re not there yet-- ask Him for a desire to want to be there...it is all by His grace.