

Walking with Mary, Part 1

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Hi, I'm Dr. Edward Sri. Excited to be with you for this Pray More Novena's Advent Retreat. And every advent, I love to think about the Blessed Virgin Mary and her anticipation in waiting for the birth of her son, but for us today, I want to think about the human Mary. How many of you know the human Mary? Not just the Mary of doctrine and devotion, which is awesome and essential for us as Catholics, of course, and not just the Mary of your beautiful stained-glass windows and statues in your churches, but I'm talking about the human Mary. What was going on in the inside of Mary step-by-step throughout her life.

The Human Mary

Sometimes I think we could put Mary on such a high pedestal, and we should. She was uniquely privileged, uniquely graced. She's the immaculate conception. It's awesome, but yet we can't forget that she was also one of us. She was human and she experienced human things like we do. Joys, sufferings, uncertainty, darkness. There's times in the Bible where the Bible says, Mary did not understand. Now I think she understood better than anyone else, but she still had to walk by faith and not by sight. And the only thing she could do is, the Bible says, "*Keep and ponder these things in our heart.*"

Have you had moments of uncertainty in your life? If you've had moments of suffering, of darkness, well, Mary can relate to you, and she wants to relate to you. And that's what I want to get into in this session. We're going to go, it's actually over two sessions, we're going to look at Mary's life and we're going to look at the journey of faith that God led her on. St. John Paul II one of my great favorite theologians reflecting on the blessed Virgin Mary, he writes about how Mary had to continually renew her fiat. It was as if the heavenly father was step-by-step throughout her life, not just at Nazareth with Gabriel, but all throughout her life. From the annunciation to the visitation, to the nativity, all the way to the cross. God, the Father is inviting Mary to take that next step to love more, to surrender more, to trust more.

Hail Mary

So, you ready? You want to get into that interior life of Mary, her, what John Paul II called, her interior pilgrimage of faith. That's what we're going to look at in this session. Let's ask her to pray for us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, amen. Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and bless it as the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God. Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen. In the name of the father and the son, the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The Human Emotions

So when was Mary's first big step of faith that we see in scripture, at least. In the word of God, in the Bible, where do we first see her great step of faith? Many people would say her fiat. When she says behold, I'm the handmaid of the lord, be it done to be according to your word, which is an awesome moment, but there's something Pope Benedict once wrote that made me realize that there's something earlier, earlier in the biblical story that reveals Mary's tremendous faith on the inside. It comes at the beginning of the annunciation. When the angel first comes to Mary and says, hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Do you remember Mary's response to the angel? Do you remember her emotional response? What kind of emotion did Mary have? Was she full of excitement? 'Oh, cool, an angel's here!' Enthusiasm, I can't wait to do whatever the angel tells me to do. What emotion does the Bible tell us she has?

The Bible tells us that she was greatly troubled. In Luke 1:29, Mary was *greatly troubled*. And the angel has to say to her, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Here's my question for you. Do you ever have moments in your life when you're greatly troubled?

Do you ever have moments when you're afraid? If you've ever had moments like that, just know Mary's right there with you. Again, this is what I want us to see is that yes, Mary is uniquely graced and privileged and perfect, right? And yet she experiences human things. But what I'm going to look at is how she responds. Mary experienced fear. Mary experienced being greatly troubled. That's human, but what Mary does with it, what she does with those troubles and fears is extraordinary. And it shows us the pathway forward.

How Mary Responds in Her Troubles

You see many times when we are overwhelmed by something, we can close in on ourselves. And we look at our problems and we're like, oh my goodness, how's this ever going to work out? Mary was unlike that. What we're going to see is something beautiful, Mary. Let's take a look at how Mary responds with her troubles. And it's a great model for us and how we should respond interiorly as well.

But first of all, what's she troubled by? It's interesting. I used to think it was an angel. I mean, if you're in the middle of your day, let's say you're doing dishes in the kitchen, all of sudden you turn around and there's an archangel there, I think you'd be greatly troubled too. I know I would

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be, but that's not what the Bible says. She's not troubled at the sight of the angel. The Luke 1:29 tells us Mary was greatly troubled at the saying, at the saying of the angel. And she considers in her mind the greeting.

And so, there's something about the angels greeting, the words, that's more startling than the sight of the angel himself, but what did the angel say? He just simply said, "**Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you.**" Now, if I say to you, the Lord be with you, I mean, we're so used to hearing that word, right? We hear that word all the time at mass. If I say the Lord be with you, you all say, and with your spirit because you know the new mass translation. Did Mary know the new mass translation, no. Did she know the old one, no. The mass wasn't instituted yet, but what would those words, "**the Lord is with you,**" what would they have meant to an ordinary Jewish woman of the first century?

Every Jew, you don't have to be a biblical scholar, but every Jew in the first century would have known those words because they're repeated over and over again in their scriptures that they heard all the time that they listened to. This is like their iTunes. This is their social media, is the word of God, the Bible. They're hearing it all the time in the synagogue, celebrating it in the feast days. They're meditating on the word of God. It's just a part of their culture. That's their pop culture.

And so, when a Jew, and like Mary in the first century, hears the words the Lord be with you, she knows, oh wow. Those words are always used throughout salvation history when God is addressing someone, calling them to some big tasks some big mission where they're going to be stretched like never before. They're going to have to rely on God like never before. And that's why God or the angel will say, the Lord will be with you. The Lord will help you do what you can't do on your own. Like Moses at the burning Bush. God calls him to go back to Egypt where they were trying to kill him and confront the wicked dictator Pharaoh and convince Pharaoh to let the people go.

I mean, how many of you think that was a job Moses was gunning for? No way. Moses tries everything in the book to get out of it. I don't know you, Lord. I don't know much theology. I'm not eloquent. The people aren't going to believe in me. I'm not a good leader. And what does God say? Does God say, oh no, Moses, you're a lot better than you think, you've got talent. No, that's not what God says. God basically says to Moses, yup, you're pretty pathetic. You're pretty weak. But I will be with you. In other words, I will be with you to help you do what you can't do on your own. My strength will be made manifest in your weakness. It's as if God is saying that to him.

And Moses hears those words and God does great things through Moses. Same thing, Joshua's called to lead the people in the promised land. There's large armies ready to pounce on the

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Israelites and God says, be courageous. Why, because I will be with you. Gideon hears those words in Judges 6:12. Gideon is told to go fight off the Midianites. Well, Gideon's not a soldier. He has no military experience. He doesn't even have an army. How is he supposed to do this? God says, through the angel, I will be with you. The Lord will be with you. David hears those words at the beginning of his kingdom. The prophets hear those words when they begin their prophetic ministry. And then the young Virgin of Nazareth, Mary hears those words.

How do you think Mary's feeling when she hears the Lord be with you? What is she thinking? She's thinking, uh-oh. Uh-oh, she knows what that means. Something big is about to be asked of her like Moses and Joshua and Gideon, David and the prophets. Something big is about to be asked of Mary. Now, Mary doesn't know what that mission is yet. We know where the story goes, but she doesn't know yet. She just knows something really demanding is being asked of her now. And when she hears that, she approaches it with a little trepidation as she should.

A Question For You

Here's my question for you though. In life, do you have times in life when you feel overwhelmed? When you feel like I don't know how I'm going to do this. I don't know how I'm going to take care of these children. I'm just so stretched as a parent. I'm overwhelmed. Or I've got this project at work. I don't know how it's all going to work out and this complicated thing with my boss. I don't know how it's all going to work out. I just feel overwhelmed or this challenge and the parish or in my diocese. And I don't know how these things are going to get better. And I don't think it's ever going to change. Or maybe in your marriage, you feel like, man, things aren't going well. I just don't know if my spouse will ever understand or if he or she will ever change, and I just feel overwhelmed by this.

Maybe you feel like this in your prayer life or your spiritual life. There's things you want to change, things you want to get better at and you just feel overwhelmed by it. Or maybe you just look out at what's happening in the culture. Maybe you're someone that fears what's going to happen in the future. It's hard for you to give up control. You like to have everything in control, but the future makes you anxious. You're wondering what's going to happen with my job. What's going to happen in this dating relationship. What's going to happen with my child. What's going to happen with the virus, and we get anxious. You see, what we're going to see here, my friends, is Mary shows us how to handle the troubles that we face, that we all face in this life.

Talking to God About Her Troubles

You see, the Bible tells us, it's interesting, it says that Mary considered in her mind the greeting. She considered in her mind the greeting. And Pope Benedict, I wrote about this once. I remember reading Pope Benedict, it's something he wrote way back. I think it was 2008. He

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wrote about this language when it says in Luke 1:20 that Mary considered in her mind the greeting. The word considered in Greek is where we get the word daily, where we get the word dialogue in English. And the idea is that Mary, when she feels that trouble, she dialogues with God. In other words, she turns to prayer. She talks to God about her troubles. Pope Benedict says "Mary enters into an interior dialogue with the Word. She carries on an inner dialogue with the word that was given her. She speaks to it and lets it speak to her." It's beautiful.

Anxiety is Not from God

So, the idea is that Mary, when she faces these troubles, she talks to God about it. That's what she does. She turns to God. So, Mary experiences fear, she experiences a little trepidation as she should. God's about to ask something big of her. That's what she realizes when she hears the words from the angel. The Lord be with you. But here's the difference between Mary and us. It's how Mary, how she deals with that fear. She doesn't allow that fear to control her. She doesn't allow her emotions to take over. She's not a slave to her emotions. She's not a slave to those fears. You see, Jesus reminds us. He says, "do not be anxious." We should never fall into anxiety. Anxiety is not from God.

Now having caution, having a little bit of foresight and thinking things through, having genuine concern about something, that's actually really good. That's human, that's normal. That's what Mary is experiencing. But she doesn't allow herself to be overwhelmed by the circumstances unfolding before her, the uncertainty about the future. What does this mean for my life? What's going to happen? How are things going to change? What's God going to ask of me? She doesn't allow herself to close in on herself and fall into anxiety. Anxiety is never from God. The anxiety is when we lose our inner peace.

Yes, again, we should have genuine concern about our things, but you tend to close in on yourself. Let's be more like Mary. Now, how does Mary deal with this when she experiences these troubles? She turns to God. That's what that expression means that we just read about. She considered in her mind. In other words, she's dialoguing with God, interiorly. Talking to God about it. God loves it when we come to Him with our troubles and we just tell Him, Lord, I'm a little overwhelmed right now, I'm a little uncertain.

What does this mean for me? I'm concerned, Lord. And I bring my problems to Him. That's what helps us to experience this inner peace when we bring our problems to the God who's so big, so big much bigger than any problem I might have in my family, in my job, with my health, with my finances, with a relationship, whatever it might be. The problem is many times we look at those problems and we look at them and we might say a quick prayer and we know God's there, but we're so focused on the problem and we think the problem's so big, it crushes us, and then we'll lose our inner peace, and we fall into anxiety, anxiety about the future, anxiety about what's

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going to happen. God doesn't want that for you. God wants us to be like Mary. Mary turned everything to the Lord. She talked to God about it. She considers in her mind the greeting. That's why she's able to move forward and give her great fiat. You see, when we're overwhelmed by anxiety, it's hard for us to say yes to God and what he's asking of us in the midst of whatever troubles we have, whatever is unfolding in our lives because we're just so focused on our troubles apart from God.

Saying Yes to the Lord

But when we are like Mary and we dialogue with God, we can give a big, yes. We can say yes to the Lord. Whether it's a yes to embrace a cross that He's asking us to carry or whether it's a yes to make a change, a yes in repenting from a certain sin, we just need to give up and we need to detach from and make and make that change or to say yes to the Lord to continue to walk with Him in uncertainty. Many times, the Lord is asking us just to trust Him. To trust He's there, even though we can't see. We don't know where this is going. We don't know how it's all going to work out. That growing and trust is really good for us.

You see, we can say a big yes and give a big fiat like Mary will in Luke 1:38. When she gives her big yes, she's able to do that first because she dialogued with God. She turned everything over to Him in prayer. So that's my encouragement to you as we are considering Our Lady in this Advent retreat in this first step of great faith is whatever is troubling you right now, the stress of the Christmas season or the advent season leading up to Christmas, the travel, the packing, the gifts, the in-laws coming over. Maybe you're stressed about that right now. Or maybe there's just something else that's been weighing on you for a while. Turn it to the Lord in prayer, really. Surrendering it or not just say a few prayers about it, Jesus help me. Just go to Him and say, "Lord, I feel really nervous about this, I'm uncertain about this." Talk to Him about it. Whenever we turn these things over to the Lord, that act itself, that little act of surrender and trusting it to Him, that alone can bring a deeper inner peace.

So, Mary pray for us as we continue to walk with you. We're going to go consider Mary next at the nativity. And we're going to consider Mary's choice at Cana, the big choice she had to make at the wedding at Cana. Do you know what that big choice was? We're going to talk about that next session, how it leads all the way to the cross. *Mary pray for us in Jesus name, Amen.*