

Mary's Fiat & Ours **Michelle Karen D'Silva**

Hello and welcome to The Pray More Lenten Retreat. My name is Michelle Karen D'Silva and I'm so blessed to be accompanying you all the way from Qatar. Friends, today we're gonna talk about faith through the witness of Our Lady. She is a crucial part of this lenten journey with whom we can confidently walk toward Calvary without fear because she is with us. And so as we begin, I invite you to prayerfully and meaningfully with me recite the hail Mary as we lean upon her intercession, even as we open up our hearts. So let's begin. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners us now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Mary, our mother, pray for us, intercede for us.

Being a Prodigal Daughter

Friends, when I moved to the Middle East in 2002, for the first two years, my husband and I struggled financially, socially and emotionally. We didn't have our residence visa for two years. Our application was rejected seven times. Somewhere between those failed applications, I had my conversion experience. In fact, it's one of the reasons I went to a prayer meeting in the first place. And I remember standing on the threshold of the eighth application utterly skeptical when a sister from the prayer group called me and said to me, "Mother Mary will never fail you. She's got you." And she did. Our results were out on 8 September, the birthday of Our Lady. And lo and behold, our application was successful.

I wish I can say to you that I ran into the arms of our blessed mother and I walked in her footsteps like an obedient daughter, but I didn't. I remained her prodigal daughter for many years unable to relate to her, unable to fully understand her role in the Catholic Church until a few years ago when God began to stir my heart towards Mary, both as mother and intercessor. And so if you're in a place like me, struggling to understand the role of Our Lady in the church, or if you're in a place where your heart is heavy, I just invite you to come just as you are. And I wanna whisper the same words that were spoken over me. Mother Mary will never fail you. She's got you. She sees you. She knows you, she understands you because she's a good, good mother.

The Forbidden Fruit

Friends, I love sacred art. And one of my favorite paintings of Mary is the painting titled "Mary Consoles Eve." It's a beautiful painting that has rich hues that depict beautiful mysteries. But what I love about the painting is that in one frame, we have two women whose choices changed our history. We have Mary whose fiat accomplished God's plan for salvation, the reason you and I are sitting here today and we have Eve whose disobedience brought about the fall, the consequence of which you and I live with every single day.

But as we ponder on the narrative of that forbidden fruit, we know that there is so much more than prohibition there, isn't it? In fact, I think we have a tendency to place so much emphasis on the prohibition that we forget the grace of permission. Adam and Eve were given permission to enjoy the garden fully, completely. They would've fully partaken in God's divine plan. God's goal for them was to be fully alive just as God's goal for us is not merely to survive, but to thrive, to flourish and to bear fruit. And isn't this where the enemy plays the hardest? The Devil doesn't want us to be fully alive. He wants us to live lukewarm, enslaved, lesser than lives. Did God really say he provoked Eve in Genesis 3:1?

In other words, I know why God doesn't want you to have good things. He doesn't want you to be fully alive and therefore, you must grasp from him lest he take from you. You must assume control lest you lose your freedom. And don't we do that in our lives? Don't we make agreements with these lies? Don't we call into question God's nature to be good, especially during difficult times? Don't we try to covet and grasp lest we lose control? Friends, we all do. We all do. And that is the beauty of Lent, isn't it? It exposes our hearts but not to shame us, to bring us total freedom so we can be fully alive like the saints, like Mary who teaches us that true freedom is not in doing what we want to do. True freedom is living in the truth of who we are. And I love what Saint Edith Stein says. She says, "None of us is completely free from this fierce tendency to grasp and control. Every woman has something in herself inherited from Eve and therefore she must make that journey from Eve to Mary."

A Reversal of the Lie

And friends, we know this is not just for women, this is for every child of God. Every single one of us has inherited this tendency to grasp from our first mother. And therefore, we must make that journey from Eve, our first mother to our blessed mother, the new Eve whose obedience reverses that lie, that lie that says to us God is a rival. God is not a rival. He is the giver of every good and perfect gift. God's desire for your life and my life is only to bless us. And I love how the feast of the Annunciation falls during Lent.

Mary teaches us so much to release that grip and simply receive. And we know that Mary had every temptation to grasp not knowing what lies ahead or to make right what feels unsettled. But Mary doesn't. She simply receives, she becomes open to the gift of God and in receiving the gift of God, she becomes a gift unto others. And so as we reflect on this annunciation, let's call to mind the words the angels spoke to Mary. One of the first words the angels spoke to Mary was greetings. That's a sign of joy. The King James Version uses the word rejoice but friends, you and I both know that it is challenging to rejoice when our plans are interrupted or when our dreams are shattered. And therefore, the reason to rejoice is revealed in those words as it was revealed to Mary. The Lord is with you. The Lord is with you. And the Lord is with us. He is the source of our joy. He is the cause of our hope. He is a very comfort even when we sin. And so in this season, perhaps you may be skeptical to go to confession because you say, "You know what? I've relapsed into that same sin again. And so why bother?"

Pope Francis reminds us beautifully that when we relapse into sin again and again, let us relapse into the mercy of God again and again because there is not so much that we go to God, but that he comes to us first. He is waiting for us. He has loved us first. He is waiting to rejoice over us.

When the angel announced to Mary, the Lord is with you, Luke 1:29 says, "Mary was deeply troubled, not so much by the sight of the angel but by those words because it brought to mind what God had spoken to patriarchs and prophets in the Old Testament." And so when God called someone into a great task and a great mission, those words were spoken, "The Lord is with you." And so those words that came to Mary, as much as they brought comfort, they also brought a sense of apprehension.

What is God Calling You to Do?

Am I able to do what God is calling me to do? And yet Mary does not respond to her fears. In fact, she responds in faith. She becomes open to God's will and to God's word. When the angel says to her, "Do not be afraid," she clings to those words. She clings to God's word. They are more than enough for her and they are more than enough for us. Friends, Perhaps this Lent God is calling you to give yourself completely to him. And maybe you're afraid because you wonder what this may demand. Or maybe God is putting in your heart, maybe you sense this tug, or you've been feeling this tug for a long time that God is asking you to leave behind the shores of safety and to step out into the unknown with God. Maybe God is calling you to give him more room in your daily prayer life, even in the midst of your busy schedule. Or perhaps you'll feel him stirring your heart to release a grasp of the unforgiveness you've been holding in your heart for so long. Perhaps a certain sin, a certain addiction that has left you crippled and enslaved. The call to discipleship is radical. Partial obedience is disobedient. God desires all of you. God desires your whole heart. And so often, you know, we begin with our own efforts and when they fail, we turn to God. But Mary teaches us to begin with God. He is the cause and completion of our journey. Mary practiced the presence of God daily and therefore, she was able to rise above her fear. She was able to rise above people pleasing and she was able to pour out from the depth of her well.

A Yes to God

In Luke 1:35, the angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you. And the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Friends, this is the secret. We cannot do it on our own. We need a power greater than our own. We need the Holy Spirit to recognize the poverty of our own hearts. All the places we settle, all the praises we want to grasp and control. We need his power to rise above our fear and step out in faith. We need the spirit of love to dispel any false notions we have of God the Father. We need his fire to rouse us from our slumber so we can go forth as blazing witnesses. In and through the power of the Spirit, Mary responded, "Let it be done to me according to thy word." It is not God, what can you do for me? But rather, what can I do for you? And her fiat, her yes is not some passive yes or resigned acceptance. She willfully participated in God's plan even when she did not understand. Friends, there are so many of us who want to serve God but on our own terms. So many of us want to become disciples as long as we don't have to carry the cross.

But Jesus reminds us in Matthew 16:22-24, "If anyone wishes to be my disciple, he must deny himself, pick up the cross and follow me." And so the question this Lent is how will I respond? Will I follow Jesus only in the comfortable parts where it's easy as long as I don't have to give up anything, as long as I don't have to forgive or make peace, as long as I don't have to suffer, as

long as I don't have to give up my rights, my passions, my dreams, my interests, my social life. And Jesus says, "No, you want to be my disciple, you must deny yourself. Pick up the cross and follow me." If not, you follow me only as a spectator, not as a witness. A disciple is a witness. Mary was the first witness. From the moment of her conception when she responded to God's call, Mary became open to the call of God and the cross became an inevitable part of Mary's life. Her fiat as Saint John Paul II says was not restricted only to her annunciation. It was renewed perpetually, which means over and over again, Mary was faced with choices, over and over again as the events of her life unfolded, as the mysteries of her life unfolded, Mary had a choice to say yes or to say no.

Just as you and I have a choice daily to say yes or no. We have a choice to respond in faith or to give into our fear. We have a choice to satisfy our own longings or to surrender to God. We have a choice to flee from the cross or to give our suffering, our pain, our disappointment, our suffering and unite them with Jesus' suffering on the cross.

God is Waiting for Your Yes Today

Friends, where is God calling you to carry your cross? Is it in the area of your vocation? Is it in your marriage? Is it in your parenting? Is it in your health? Is it in your relationships? Is it in your sexuality? And what is stopping you from giving yourself completely to God? Mary's fiat, if anything teaches us that God withholds nothing from us. On the cross with his hands, with his feet nailed, he cannot grasp. He can take nothing from us. He can only give. And the sorrow that he places upon us as we die to things of self and the world, it's not a sorrow that is aimless, but one that points to the hope of the resurrection, there where all our longings are restored and where all is made well.

And so friends, God is waiting for your yes today. See the impact one yes in history. Cities were changed, nations were changed. You and I are sitting here today because of Mary's yes. Who in your life needs your yes today? Is it your spouse? Is it your children? Is it your family? Is it a friend? Is it someone from your community? Is it someone in your neighborhood? Is it your boss? There are people God has placed in your path that are waiting for you to come alive. Empowered by the Spirit, Mary went forth, she made haste to share the good news with Elizabeth because we can never encounter the love of God and remain the same.

Today the same Spirit wants to empower you. That same Spirit wants to give you courage to rise above a fear and respond in faith. He wants to empower you to become an authentic witness right where you are placed, right where you are. And so as we pray and we ask for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit for we cannot do it on our own.

Closing Prayer

And friends, I invite you at this moment to just surrender what is holding you back from giving yourself completely to God, from giving your fiat to God. And we ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit at this moment. We say, "Lord, overshadow us. Let the power of the Most High rest upon us. Fill us, empower us, give us strength in our weakness. Give us power where we are weak. Lord, we ask you to come into those places where we have settled with the lies. All those

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places where we just want control. We give you at this moment, places of our fear, places where we manipulate with our emotions, places where we are grasping because we are so afraid. And Holy Spirit, we ask you to come. And Mama Mary, you are such a good mother. You are such a good mother. And so I place before you, mama at this moment all those who have strained relationship with their mothers and perhaps find it difficult to come to you. You are so good. You deny no one, anyone who comes to you, implores your intercessions is never left unaided. And so we come to you, Mary, we give to you our hearts. We give to you our broken hearts. We give to you the fractured places of our well. Restore us, we pray. Pray for us, oh holy mother of God that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Come, Holy Spirit. Be with us. Stay with us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. And God bless you.