

## **Not by Bread Alone**

### **Michelle Karen D'Silva**

Hello friends, welcome to the Pray More Lenten Retreat. My name is Michelle Karen D'Silva and I'm so grateful for the opportunity to journey with you this Lent. You know, Lent can be a time of very deep spiritual interior cleansing, and that can be very hard sometimes. And I've been praying for you, I've been praying for your heart, I've been praying for your loved ones, and most especially praying that the Word of God becomes the center of your spiritual life, not just during Lent, but throughout your lifetime.

Friends, today I want to talk to you today about just that, I want to talk to you about the Word of God. And so as we prepare our hearts to receive the Word of God, let's invite the Holy Spirit, because it is He who illuminates our minds to understand the scriptures. It is He who plants a seed of faith in our hearts. It is He who makes our hearts fertile. And it is He who empowers us to go bear fruit. And so let's welcome the Holy Spirit at this time, right where you are.

### **Opening Prayer**

We just whisper those words, come, Holy Spirit. Fall afresh upon us. Lord, we surrender our hearts to you. We give you our mind, we give you our will. We give you our memory, our emotions. We give you this present moment but we also give you where we're coming from. You know us more than we know ourselves. You know our end before the beginning. You know where we are in this Lenten journey. And so I pray, I pray for the seed of the Word of God to be planted in our hearts today. That the Word of God becomes rhema, it becomes living, alive in our hearts. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we pray and through the intercession of our Lady. Amen, amen.

### **Missing the Whisper of God**

Friends, you know, in 2017, on our way to the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Rome, our youth group in Qatar stopped in Switzerland for three days. We stayed at a cozy little place up in the mountains. And the first two days were spent, you know, exploring the city, taking long drives, and making a lot of noise. But on the third day we decided to wake up early in the morning and go to a nearby mountain to pray. Now, young people are enthusiastic about a lot of things, but waking up on a cold Switzerland morning is not one of them. But one of the boys who accompanied me that morning, and we made our way to the familiar path. As we walked in that sheer quietness of the morning, we heard a sound. Very faint at first, but slowly increasing in volume. As we followed the trail of that sound, it got louder. And before we knew it we were standing before this torrential river, gushing forth from the mountains, filling that valley with life and energy. And as we worshiped that morning, I realized that the river was always there. It is we were being so busy that we missed both its sight and its sound.

Can this happen to us in our spiritual life? It can and it does. In a world of deafening noise and entertaining voices, we can miss the whisper of God in our daily lives. Friends, our God is a God who desires to speak to us, and God speaks to us through people, through creation, through the prophets, through circumstances. But one of the most profound ways that God speaks to us is through the Spirit-inspired Word of God.

We read that beautiful story of the Exodus during Lent, don't we? In Exodus 20, we see how the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt, out of slavery, they came to Mount Sinai where they were given the Law of God. But it's so interesting that before the 10 Commandments were ever written on tablets of stone, they were first spoken by God to man. That language of, "You shall, you shall not," is not first given to a collective nation, it's first coming to a person individually. Because that is how God comes to us. He comes to us individually, personally, and intimately. And therefore in the fullness of time, as it says in Galatians 4:4, God sent that Word in person. The Lord Jesus Christ, the very Word of God, who came and dwelled amongst us. In Luke 4:21, before Jesus begins His public ministry, He opens a scroll and He reads aloud. He says, "Today, the Scripture is fulfilled to you. Today, the Word of God is no longer only a promise. It has taken flesh. He lives among you. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, he desires to live inside of you." Friends, today there is a famine, not so much of food and water, but as Amos 8:11 says, it's a famine of hearing the Word of God.

You know, we live in a world of many words, an age of many arguments. Look at our social media feed, it's inundated with competing and conflicting voices daily that occupy the sacred space within us. This space that must make room for the Word of Life. Is it any wonder, then, why God's people, rather than living the abundant life that Christ died to give us, we live instead diminished, exhausted, lesser than lives? Saint Jerome said, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." When we don't know Him, the Word of Life, we don't know the standards for a holy, fuller life. When we don't know the standards for a holy life, we don't know what fruitfulness is, we don't know what makes us whole, we don't know what brings us true fulfillment, meaning and purpose in our life.

## **Importance of God's Word**

You know, a couple of years ago, after trying to manage months of random inflammation in my body, I finally visited a doctor, only to discover that I had an autoimmune condition. I had just begun to travel on mission at the time, and so this diagnosis was like a brutal pause in my path. On the outside, I looked completely normal. But on the inside, inwardly, this condition shaped every aspect of my life, throwing me into a world of unexpected doctors visits, unpleasant side effects like, I don't know, skin eruptions and body weight and fatigue and pain. But more than the ache of physical pain was my interior struggle. I felt powerless, I felt vulnerable, I felt fearful, I felt angry, I felt like I couldn't fulfill my dreams, I felt like I couldn't fulfill my calling, I was restless, trying to find every site on Google for answers. Until I returned to the Word of God. It is there that I received a paradigm shift to my perspective.

God's Word brought tremendous comfort, but it also illuminated my heart. It exposed areas of my pride, my self-sufficiency, my self-righteousness. It exposed areas of my insecurities, my

fears. And it also brought to surface all those places where I wanted to serve God but on my own terms. The Word of God is a powerful weapon against the energy of our soul who wages war on our emotions, especially when we're exhausted and when we go through difficult times. In Matthew 4, he came to Jesus in a threefold temptation. Seeing Jesus utterly exhausted after fasting for 40 days and 40 nights, he provoked Jesus. "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread." His goal was to tempt Jesus to make his mission more about satisfying his own needs rather than fulfilling the Word of God. And he does the same with us.

And so I love what Pope Francis tells us, he reminds us that we must never enter into a dialogue with the enemy. Rather, we must enter into a dialogue with the Word of God who desires to speak to us, who desires to lead us and guide us and sustain us and protect us from the fiery arrows of the evil one. In the Garden of Eden, we saw how Eve entered into a dialogue with the enemy and was defeated. Mary, on the other hand, entered into a dialogue with the Word of God and fulfilled God's plan. She pondered on the angel's greeting. That word pondered in Greek is the word dialogue. Jesus never entered into a dialogue with the enemy. In fact, he refuted his proposals by quoting and by claiming the Word of God. He said, "It is written man does not live on bread alone, but from every word that comes from the mouth of God."

## **The Lord is Inviting You**

You see, friends, God's Word has to become flesh in our lives. You know, each one of us has a vast subconscious area in our minds that is filled with unpleasant, painful memories. As someone who counsels youth on a regular basis, I know how these experiences can cause us to become pathologically doubtful and fearful, negative and angry. Through the daily devotion of prayer and the Word of God, I have seen, I've encountered so many people who've been set free from shame and fear and bondage. In my own life, I struggled with many habitual sins, even after my conversion. I had many dysfunctional patterns. Until the Word of God became the center of my spiritual journey. I realized that it wasn't enough for me to just read the Word. The Word must read me. He must read the most deepest, broken places of my human existence.

This Lent, my dear friends, the Lord is inviting you and me to abide in his Word. The Greek word abide is the word "meno", which simply implies a dwelling place, a constant residence. If we abide in Christ, He is present with us, He lives with us. He wants to dwell where we dwell. God wants to take room not just in our homes, He wants to be our very home. And so the Word of God must take precedent in our lives, it must penetrate our hearts. God's truth, God's promises must come to the forefront of our minds. Only then we can refute the lies of the enemy. The devil can never stand against the Word of God because it is a double-edged sword. In fact, Saint Paul in Ephesians 6:17 reminds us that the Word of God, he calls it the sword of the Spirit, the only weapon of offense in the arsenal of defense.

## **A story of two disciples on the way to Emmaus**

Friends, I'd like to close with a very familiar narrative that we read, you know, during Easter season, this post-resurrection masterpiece that is found in Luke 24. You know the story so well. It's a story of two disciples on the way to Emmaus. And we know the story. There's two of them. One of them is Cleopas, the other is unnamed. And their story really begins after Jesus is

crucified and all their hopes for a political Messiah are shattered. Their only resort is to leave Jerusalem, the center of their mission, and retreat to Emmaus, seven miles away from Jerusalem. And as they're making their way to Emmaus, Scripture says that they are joined by a stranger, a wayfarer of sorts. Jesus the Risen Christ accompanies their broken road. But very interesting, in verse 16, it says that they're prevented from recognizing him. You see, their outward inability to recognize Jesus mirrors their inward inability to believe what Jesus revealed about himself in the scriptures. Their main problem was not in their heads, it was in their hearts. You see, they've known about Jesus, but did they know him personally? No. Not until he opened their minds, not until he opened the scriptures to them. And then, beginning from Genesis all through the Old Testament, Jesus begins to reveal how his life, death and resurrection were part of God's great redemptive plan written hundreds of years before it came to be.

Think about the plight of these men. These are pious Jews who've known Torah their whole life, and yet they had missed the centrality of the message. Can this happen to us, brothers and sisters? It can. You see, sometimes we are so ritualistic in reading the Word of God that we miss the voice of the Spirit in our hearts. Sometimes we are so ritualistic at mass that we miss the Word of God spoken over us, desiring to transform our hearts there at the eucharistic table. And so as the scriptures are revealed to them through the power of the Holy Spirit, something begins to happen inside of them.

In verses 30 to 32, it tells us that their hearts begin to burn and their eyes are opened. Now the true image of God is before them. God is no political warrior. He is a suffering servant. God's mission is not war and win. God's mission is love and mercy. He is the true shepherd who recklessly seeks that one lost sheep. He is a relentless lover. He is a tender, compassionate father. He is the Risen Christ who accompanies our broken road. Not just accompanies, but embodies our suffering. He's one who gives himself willfully for our sake. He's one who empties himself for the sake of love.

And so now their minds are opened, illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Their hope is rekindled, and Scripture says they begin to plead with Jesus to stay with them. Because that is what happens when the Word of God takes flesh in our hearts. We want to abide in Jesus. Their hearts begin to burn. Their hearts begin to burn for mission. And where is the place of their mission? It's not in the safe harbor of Emmaus. It is in Jerusalem. It's in the place of pain and suffering. It's in the place of defeat. It's in the place of fear and death. It's in the place of sorrow and sacrifice. And that is where they return to, empowered by the Spirit, filled with the revelation of the Word of God. Friends, there is a reason why this other disciple is unnamed. I believe it is because we can put our name there.

## **What is Your Mission?**

And so in this Lenten season, the Church is inviting us to name the place of our mission. Where is your Jerusalem? Is it in your marriage? Is it in your family? Is in your friendship, is it in your vocation? Is it in your past? Is it a particular situation, maybe loss or tragedy, something you're running away from? Some place you're running away from, someone you're running away from. Jesus wants to encounter you today. He wants to accompany your broken road. He wants to reveal himself to you. He wants to reveal his Word to you, he wants to illuminate your mind so

you understand, so you accept and believe that he is for you, not against you. That his promises for you are yes and amen, so you believe that nothing, nothing is impossible for God. Luke 4:21, "Today, the Scripture is being fulfilled to you. Today, the Word of God desires to become flesh in you. Today, the Word wants to heal you and deliver you and set you free."

## **Closing Prayer**

And so right where you are, let's just ask the Holy Spirit at this moment to make the Word of God a living reality in our lives. The anchor of our lives, the only standard, the only benchmark, the only blueprint for our lives. For it is the surest way to freedom and life. And so, Father, I pray at this moment for every brother, every sister watching. You know where they're at. You're a God who accompanies us but you meet us at the point of our need. You never force yourself on us. You never push us. You never play games with us. You tenderly come to us. You walk with us in our discouragement, in our despondency, in our defeat, in our failure, even when we want to run away from the place of our mission.

And so I pray at this moment, I pray for the Word of God to become rhema in our hearts. I pray for a deep hunger and thirst for the Word of God. I pray, Jesus, at this moment that your Word would convict us, That it would comfort us. Lord, I pray at this moment that you would give us ears to listen. Not just to listen, but to obey. That we become a people who don't just read, who don't just hear, who don't just listen, but we become doers of the Word of God. That people know us because we live the Word. That people know You through us because we live the Word. I pray for our hearts to burn at this moment. Perhaps there are people here who've always desired to study the Word, to know your Word, but something always gets in the way. I pray, Jesus, for courage, I pray for the power of your Spirit at this moment to take away any kind of barrier.

I pray for the Word of God to come back to homes, to families, to marriages. I pray for time in this busy world. I also pray for those who are carriers of the Word, prophets of the Word. That you empower them, that you flood their hearts with the light of your Word. That they're able to bring your authentic message to a world perishing without hope. I pray for mothers and fathers at this time, that they may receive the Word, that they're able to speak this Word over their children.

And I pray at this moment, Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady, that if there is any kind of sickness in body, mind, that your Word would go forth and heal. Anyone struggling here with any kind of addiction, bondage, habitual sin, mental illnesses, that your Word would go forth and set them free. That your Word would deliver. I pray for those who are going through loss, that your Word would comfort. I lift up those who are going through difficulties and struggles in their relationships, broken relationships. Jesus, I pray that your Word would go forth at this moment and restore, that your Word would deliver us and set us free. I pray this in your name, Jesus. You are the Word of God, living among us, living in us. Amen. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless.