

## A Protestant Discovers (or is Discovered by) the Real Mary

“Lord, sanctify us in Your Truth; Your Word is Truth.” Amen.

Thank you, Father Jan, for your kind invitation to offer this Lenten Mission to Holy Trinity parish this year. I am honoured to have the opportunity to serve Our Lord in your midst in this way.

In the briefest way, let me introduce myself to the assembly.

Carolyn and I have been married for almost 50 years. We have 2 children, Bradley and Theresa, both married with families, both also now joyfully Catholic. Brad is a captain with West-Jet, Theresa is a child care worker/full-time mom. Brad and his wife Cindy have 2 teenagers, Daniel, 19, who is discerning for the priesthood, and Rebecca, 18. Theresa and Gerald have 2 biological and 5 adopted children.

Carolyn and I were both raised in parsonages in the USA. My father was a Lutheran pastor, hers an Evangelical pastor. We have spent our entire married life in Alberta. I have served as pastor of 4 Lutheran parishes and as Bishop of the Alberta Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. While Bishop, I served as the Lutheran co-chair of the Lutheran-Catholic Theological Dialogue for Canada, with Archbishop Adam Exner as Catholic co-chair. In 1994 I retired for reasons of faith. At Easter Vigil in 2000 we entered into full communion with the Catholic Church and became members of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Bashaw. The Church called me to the priesthood and ordained me for the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan on February 2, 2007. I served as Chancellor of the Archdiocese and Parochial Vicar of the Cathedral Parish until last July. We are grateful to God that He gave us the privilege of living long enough to serve and die as Catholics!

The whole story of how we discovered Mary (or how she discovered us!) is too long to tell now, but here are a few of its salient features.

As Catholics, you will find this hard to believe, but you need to know that despite the witness of Scripture, despite the testimony of 2000 years of Mary's personal involvement with the Church, despite even Martin Luther's great and life-long love for Mary and his last sermon which was about her and his last prayer which was to her, most Protestants have no place for Mary in their mental furniture. She's just not there, and they are convinced that she does not belong there. I have come to see this as a tragedy of the highest order. You pay a high price when you ignore the woman Jesus Himself is sending us to anchor us to God's truth in the face of Satan's subtle lies. It was the great Hans Urs von Balthasar who made the point that God has provided His Church with TWO safeguards against the "Gates of Hell": **Peter** and **Mary**.

Protestants are sadly deprived of both, and their substitutes don't work - substitutes like sola scriptura (the Bible only) which makes everyone their own personal Peter; or the substitute that assumes you can always determine the will of God by taking a vote so that the latest fad becomes your new truth; or the substitute that embraces a lethal form of feminism uninspired by Mary's womanhood; and so on. Only the real Peter and the real Mary can stand up to "the gates of hell". Some of us Protestant Church leaders tried our best to find ways to prevent our God-less culture from marching straight into our brand of Christianity and taking over. It took way too long for me to realize that without Peter and Mary our efforts were doomed to failure. Did we think we could ignore or even improve on what Jesus Himself has given His Church to prevent the gates of hell from prevailing against her?

Let me repeat: **Peter** and **Mary**, the Pope and our Blessed Mother, are God's way of keeping His Church united to Christ and united in Christ in a world in full rebellion against Him. And they really do work!

By the early 1990's I was becoming aware that John Paul II was the one leader in Christendom who could be counted on to speak and act reliably on Jesus' behalf, whatever the cost, whatever the obstacles.

And he was constantly acknowledging his total dependence on Mary to keep him and the Church faithful to Jesus. We Protestants had no idea what he was talking about. Over time, it dawned on me that either he was wrong or we were wrong. But he was the one always close to Jesus, while we were the ones moving further away from Him every day. Our people were more influenced by the media than by Jesus, and they set the agenda. The conclusion became obvious to me: something vital was wrong with all of us who were trying to be the Church outside of communion with the Holy Father. I could no longer serve as shepherd in Christ's flock without him. I had to make a clean break with that part of my heritage which proudly defied Catholic truth. When I finally realized that **it was the thing we were most proud of in that heritage that was killing us**, I lost all faith in my denomination's ability to stand with Jesus in times like these! Our people were so proud of being their own Peter and living without Mary! They were blissfully unaware that in so doing they were committing spiritual suicide.

Our entry into the Catholic Church did not happen overnight. We were retired, so that made it easier. The Petrine Office modeled by John Paul II drew us in, but Mary's role was still a big question mark for us.

The real turning-point came in a most unexpected way. I found myself in Edmonton one day with several hours on my hands. So I took refuge in the Chapters Bookstore on Whyte Avenue and stumbled upon a copy of

the historian Thomas Walsh's book on Fatima, about which I knew almost nothing. I sat down in one of their comfortable chairs and before long I was devouring it. Now, I had had a reputation in Lutheran circles, rightly or wrongly, as a competent theologian. This book showed me in no uncertain terms that I was still in Kindergarten. Those three little kids had gone way beyond me in the sublime "science of God".

Not long afterwards, while browsing in the Universal Church Supplies Store, I happened upon a copy of the book God-Sent by Roy Abraham Varghese, with the sub-title "A History of the Accredited Apparitions of Mary". So Fatima wasn't the only one? On the back cover was a picture of Pope John Paul II blessing this book. That made it a good risk, so I bought it on the spot. In fact, I have worn out that copy. This book really covers the field on Mary's role over the centuries, a role supported by data which all Christians should welcome and want to know. I have found it a priceless treasure, spiritual dynamite, a rendezvous with Heaven for earth-bound mortals like me, and all because of Mary!

But just try to get those who most need a book like this to read it! Many Protestants won't touch it because anything to do with Mary is dismissed out of hand as "Catholic superstition". Now, according to Scripture (*Revelation 12*) the only one with a vested interest in keeping people as far away from Mary as possible is Satan. He has blinded them. I know. I was once blind myself. It's so sad. They've got it all upside down.

In Revelation 12, Mary is depicted as actively protecting all her children from Satan until the end of time. Some Christians refuse to identify the Woman in this passage with Mary. But Mary herself has settled the issue for us by how she has chosen to appear in places like Guadalupe, Medjugorje, Cuapa, etc. She wears **a crown of 12 stars, with the sun as her garment and the moon as her footstool**, just as described in Revelation 12. She comes to us as our mother, Queen of Heaven, sent to

protect “her offspring”. She herself told us in Medjugorje as recently as May, 1984: “**Throughout the centuries, I have given myself completely to you...**” The Bible told us she would, and now she herself is telling us she has. Shouldn’t every child of God know this?

It is not just a matter of blindness on their part. Some non-Catholics consider it their duty to target Catholics and wean us away from Mary and the Saints. They think all we need is Jesus, and that Mary and the Saints get in the way. These Christian brothers and sisters mean well, but they’ve got it all wrong. My heart bleeds for them. They want to deprive us of God’s chief means of keeping the **real** Jesus at the centre of our lives, as we shall see.

We Catholics, in our legitimate desire not to offend other Christians unnecessarily, have overdone it by keeping quiet about Mary. She has gone on the offensive in recent years to save the world from destroying itself. And we want to soft-pedal it? Our non-Catholic brothers and sisters need her as much as we do. If Satan is blinding them, she is calling us as her apostles to restore their sight. They are in great and immediate danger and don’t even know it. Our love for them must compel us to introduce them to Mary, who is their mother too. She is so different from who they think she is, and her mission includes them. We have nothing to lose. There are so many different “versions” of Jesus out there. Whose is the right one? Well, what human being knows Jesus better than His mother? Don’t you suppose her version is the best one? We all need Mary to be sure we are meeting the real Jesus.

“But I already have Jesus,” someone will object. “I don’t need Mary.”

“You may not think you need her,” we answer gently. “But Jesus knows you do. Otherwise, why would He be sending her to you? Don’t you

think it's a little risky to claim you love Jesus and then say No to the gift He wants to give you? He wants her to show you how to **really** love Him.

When non-Catholics finally let it happen, they melt in awe. Whenever by God's grace the Holy Spirit is able to open their eyes to see the facts, the results are a foregone conclusion. It was the Rev. David Duplessis, the "Mr. Pentecostal" of the Twentieth Century, who concluded after visiting Medjugorje that if the Holy Spirit was at work anywhere in the world, He is was work there. He told everyone that Mary was truly appearing there to draw the world to Jesus before it's too late. Respected as he was, he was heart-broken to find his people unwilling to believe.

One woman we know well, a life-long devout Christian, after reading Janice Connell's powerful book, [The Visions of the Children](#), cried out in our hearing, "Why hasn't anyone ever told me about this?"

You may remember that when the great Baptist Evangelist Dr. Billy Graham was asked who he thought was the most effective evangelist of our time, he shot back without a moment's hesitation: "John Paul II!" And when Pope John Paul II was asked the same question, his immediate response was: "The Blessed Virgin Mary!" The Holy Father was, of course, objectively correct, going by the sheer statistics. No one has even come close to bringing more people to saving faith in Jesus in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century than she has. But many Christians, including Dr. Billy Graham, are quite unaware of this. That has to change!

In the next three evenings we will be dipping into some of Mary's amazing interventions on behalf of her children in the Church "over the centuries". You will be astonished by how completely she has in fact given herself to us over the years. I hope you can join me in this great adventure. You might want to invite some non-Catholic friends. I guarantee it will be an eye-opener for them.