



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF RALEIGH CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

THE FLAME

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Our Lady's Impact In My Life

By Delia Smith

Given it is May, the month of our Blessed Mother, I wanted to give a little testimony to how Mary has helped me in my spiritual journey and also a testament to the power of the rosary.

When I reflect back on the last three years, I can personally say that I have experienced how Mary brings her children closer to her son Jesus. My first step in this was completing a consecration to the Blessed Mother. There are few different options out there for Marian consecration, the one that I did included prayers asking for virtues. The daily prayers focused on asking for the virtues of Faith, Hope, Charity, Humility, Patience, Perseverance, and Obedience. This consecration was my foundation and invitation to ask our lady to help me in my spiritual journey. Seeds were planted to assist me to grow in my faith. I renew and complete the consecration at least once a year.

In 2018 and 2019, I had the opportunity to take a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Good Help in Champion, WI (20 miles from Green Bay). It is the only approved Marian site in the United States and the only Marian site I have visited. Both visits were wonderful. I had planned to go back in 2020, however due to COVID I was unable to travel. I hope to be able to get back soon and I highly recommend this Shrine and pilgrimage. Here is a website if you are interested in more information <https://championshrine.org/>.

When COVID hit in March 2020, we were no longer able to gather in person. I felt in my heart that the Holy Spirit was prompting me to host a rosary call to continue to pray as a group and offer our intentions. At first, I thought it may only be a week or so. Then as the pandemic continued we continued to pray the rosary. For over a year we prayed the rosary 5 nights a week as a group. We still continue to this day, a couple months ago our schedule changed to three days a week. Over the past year, praying this rosary with our group has been such a blessing in my life. I notice how although I still have the struggles that all of us experience in our daily lives, I have noticed a strong increase in the peace in my heart and a lowering of anxiety I used to feel. I know through the intercession of Mary that I have experienced many internal spiritual healings. She has the title Mary Undoer of Knots and through her love and intercession I have seen resolution to many "knots" in my life. I notice a stronger love and connection to the sacraments. I also have noticed a new boldness in my faith. I used to feel self conscious about showing my faith, especially as a young person. Now, I have a Help American Pray the Rosary and Protect the Unborn bumper sticker on my car. I wear my cross and Christian jewelry proudly. I have statues and pictures outside my house. I call out Praise Reports to my family and friends to thank God for his blessings. This was not the person I was three years ago. I attribute it to the love and intercession of our dearest Blessed Mother. With her help she has brought me closer to Jesus and helped me to grow in faith.

I am grateful for this prayer community and each person in it. Wishing you and your family a blessed month of May! Please join our rosary call on Monday, Wednesday, or Thursday at 7:30PM if your schedule allows or if you have intentions we can pray on your behalf let me know. Please email me at deliasmith720@gmail.com for more information for rosary call. God Bless!

Mustard Seeds

By Debbie Rony

This morning as I spent my time in prayer, I was reflecting on all that the Lord has done in my life in the last 10 years. I was called to deeper conversion when I was going through a very, very, difficult period with my son when he was in high school. The Lord used that time to plant little mustard seeds of faith in me as I was down on my knees every day praying. I was praying for the strength to endure, for wisdom and guidance, as well as for my son to come through that time of suffering with no lasting scars. I was clinging to the Lord for daily miracles that would move us forward one day at a time and the Lord was indeed faithful. The faith that began to blossom for me after that was born out of trial and tribulation on a scale I had never experienced before. Soon after that time I was baptized in the Holy Spirit at a Healing Mass and my seeds of faith suddenly burst forth into branches that began to extend outwards. That same faith continued to cover me and shelter me like an umbrella as other difficult situations presented themselves in the years that followed. The seeds that were sown in trial blossomed into a strong tree over time and I thank God for it every day.

What came to mind this morning as I was thinking of all of this was that Jesus spoke of seeds quite a bit and he spoke of mustard seeds twice in the New Testament. Both are very relevant for the times we have just lived through and the times we face ahead of us. In Matthew 13:31, Jesus says, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds yet when it is full grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush and the birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches. "Jesus tells us this parable right after he speaks of the different kind of soil that receives seed and which one we should be (the good soil which bears fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold). The Kingdom of Heaven and the seeds that are sown are **us**, as children of God and believers in Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of Heaven is **in us** and is manifested through us by our witness of Jesus Christ, our personal testimony to what Jesus has done in our life, and our good works inspired by Him. The field in which we sow is the world and we are planted in the world as mustard seeds. Our growth in faith is an exhibit on display, a fully developed tree which invites and draws others towards faith. When we are growing in faith we naturally extend our branches outwards and "the birds of the sky" come to dwell in it. Imagine that your branches are your own hands, extended towards

others to gather others in to experience what you yourself have experienced. This is faith in action. This can only become a reality for you if you are growing in faith. **Your branches won't reach very far if your faith is small.** One of the biggest concerns I have is that people believe faith is just a small, personal thing. Scripture says no such thing. Faith is not given just for our benefit but for the benefit of others. It is not to be held onto like a prized possession but rather it is to be shared so that others **may see our faith and believe.**

As my own faith grew I felt led to get involved in healing prayer ministry, healing masses, prayer groups and faith building conferences. **Faith became an outward expression of inner transformation and a changed life.** To be sure this was the Lord's grace and He fed me as I helped to feed others. You see, we grow as a *community of faith*. We are to be living branches and always reaching out to others to extend God's mercy, love and the message of salvation to one another. This is very similar to what Jesus says in the parable of the vine and the branches. Jesus tells his disciples that they are either branches that get dried up and thrown out to be burned or they are branches that will bear fruit that remains.

As mustard trees, the Kingdom of Heaven, through our faith, is worked in us and through us. Faith is clinging to hope when everything around you looks like despair. Faith must be exercised during adversity so that the same faith that got us through can then be shared with others to give them hope. "Faith is the realization of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." We all need to ask ourselves to whom are we extending our branches of faith? Are we content to be pew warmers who just hoard this hope for ourselves and our immediate family? This is a message for today because we live in ever increasing desperate times and people need to see and hear about our faith. Time is short but the opportunity is great.

The other time Jesus speaks of a mustard seed is further on in Matthew chapter 17. There was a demonized boy who had been brought to the disciples and they could not expel the demon from him. Jesus chastises his disciples when he says, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came out to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there", and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:17-20)

Mustard Seeds Continued...

It is hard to believe that these disciples who had been travelling with Jesus, witnessing his miracles, signs, and wonders, did not have faith even the size of a mustard seed. This passage gives me encouragement though because we must realize that they were on a journey, just like us, to grow in faith. They didn't get everything right the first time and neither will we. Jesus never said we had to get it right the first time but He did say for us to have a little faith. We should be asking Him daily to grow us in faith so that through faith we can move mountains in our own lives and in that of others. Jesus promises us that "Nothing will be impossible" for us. Faith is a spiritual muscle that we must have the opportunity to flex and strengthen. If the disciples had not failed in delivering this boy from demonic possession they would never have known that they lacked the faith to do it. *The Lord doesn't always give us faith but rather He gives us opportunities to exercise faith.* I have a friend who is a cancer survivor and she wears a necklace which has a tiny encapsulated mustard seed attached to it as a reminder to have faith.

There is such a thing as a "gift of faith" which is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we should all pray for. As with any of the charisms, this type of faith is a Grace but we can certainly pray and ask for it. The last year or so has been fraught with difficulties for so many of us. It was an opportunity to grow in faith and have that little mustard seed of ours start to grow. An uncertain future lies ahead of us. We all think that maybe we can get back to "normal" now but I am hard pressed to say that I don't know if this is possible. As I write this there are gas shortages up the east coast, Israel and Palestine are attacking one another, Congress is still in turmoil, India is in severe crisis and the list goes on. We must be prepared to exercise our faith as we move forward. Every hardship, every sacrifice, every tear, and every suffering of ours was allowed for us to grow in faith. The question we now face is "What are we going to do with it?" If you never step out in faith, like the disciples, you will never know what your own personal "impossible" is. Jesus doesn't call the equipped but He equips the called. Let God water that mustard seed of faith. How many mountains are you going to try and move?

