

*Testimony of Mary Healy,  
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*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;  
his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*  
(Lamentations 3:22-23)

I began life in a “Sunday Catholic” family. In other words, we were Catholic for an hour a week, at Sunday Mass, but apart from that God didn’t have much of a place in our lives. We didn’t pray together, or read Scripture, or talk about God, or have any traditional devotions. But all that changed when I was 12 years old. My parents went on a weekend retreat led by the Cursillo movement, and they both had a personal encounter with Jesus that radically changed them. Christ became the center of their lives and they became noticeably more fervent, loving, patient, humble, and joyful. They began a custom of family prayer every evening.

As a young teenager, I was deeply impressed by what I saw in my parents, which awakened in me a hunger for God. Then through youth retreats, I too encountered the Lord. I believed in him and wanted to live for him. I joined a Bible study and a youth choir. But in hindsight, I realize now that what was missing in those activities was formation in establishing a prayer life—in how to sustain and strengthen the relationship with Jesus that I was just beginning.

When I went to university, the “spiritual high” that I had experienced on youth retreats began to wane. Since I didn’t have a strong foundation, I began to feel like God was distant. It seemed that I was in a dry desert. I wanted to get back to the sense of closeness to God I had had before, but I didn’t know how. At the same time, I was experiencing problems in relationships with friends, which made me depressed. I was very dependent on my friends for my sense of self-worth, and whenever I felt hurt or misunderstood or rejected by them, I was totally devastated. I remember walking around campus sometimes feeling empty and alone, with an

almost physical sensation of emptiness in the core of my being. I cried out to God, but he seemed to be absent.

After I graduated, I was unsure what I wanted to do, but I knew that the disparity between my faith and my life had to end. I needed God in my life. I heard about one place where it seemed that God could be found: Franciscan University of Steubenville, a place where the Catholic Charismatic Renewal was active and the Holy Spirit was very present and alive. My younger sister was a student there, and I saw a very perceptible change in her—a peace and joy and passion for the Lord that had not been there before. So I decided to go to Franciscan University for graduate studies in theology, but the real reason was to quench my spiritual thirst.

Almost as soon as I arrived, the Lord began to heal and transform me. Most of the students went to Mass every day, and the Sunday Mass was a taste of heaven on earth, celebrated with deep faith and exuberant praise and worship. The Franciscan friars who ran the university exuded the joy of the Holy Spirit. In my first confession there, the priest prayed with me for healing and deliverance, and I experienced a tremendous new freedom and peace. Around the same time, I attended a Life in the Spirit Seminar, which is a seven-week program to receive a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. It culminates with prayer for baptism in the Holy Spirit—a kind of renewal of the experience of Pentecost and a coming alive of the grace of confirmation. When I was prayed over, nothing perceptible happened. There was no emotional experience. But over the next weeks and months, I began to see that the Holy Spirit was acting powerfully to bring a deep and lasting change in my life. I'll share three signs of this change.

First, a few weeks after the Life in the Spirit Seminar, I heard that there would be an all-night vigil and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on campus. I had never done anything as radical as pray all night, and I decided to do this. I went to the chapel in the evening, determined to stay all night if possible. So I began by praying the rosary very slowly, trying to concentrate. Then I checked my watch, and found that hardly any time had passed. Then I prayed a novena... and checked my watch again. I read a little Scripture... the time was hardly passing at all! I tried praying some more, but I was getting really sleepy. Finally around 2:00

in the morning I decided that this all-night prayer thing was just beyond my capability—I wasn't holy enough! So I left the chapel. But the very moment I walked out into the cold night air, it was evident that there was a change in me. There was a Presence in my heart that was tangible. I knew Jesus was there, dwelling in me as a living tabernacle. That inner emptiness I had felt for years was completely gone. I couldn't stop praising the Lord as I walked back to my dorm. Ever since that night, that presence of the Lord has remained with me, even though I don't usually feel it tangibly, and the emptiness has never come back.

A second sign of the Holy Spirit in my life was on spring break of that year, when I went with a group of students to Daytona Beach, Florida. Every year, thousands of university students go to Florida for spring break, to drink, party and carouse. But our group from Steubenville went to evangelize. We walked along the beach, striking up conversations with strangers and talking about Jesus with whomever was open to hearing us. One evening there, we were at a local parish, praising and worshipping the Lord. We sang a song that had this refrain: "He is alive, he is alive, he is alive!" As we sang it, I suddenly had a most profound conviction in the depth of my heart: HE IS ALIVE! I suddenly knew that Jesus is risen and alive in a way I could never deny, and that this changes everything!

A third sign of the Holy Spirit in my life was a couple of years later, after I joined a Catholic and ecumenical charismatic lay community near Washington, DC. It was called Mother of God Community, and we had members who were priests, religious, single young adults, and many couples and families with children. Lay community is a beautiful way to live the Christian life intentionally. You commit yourself to this group of people—to love them, grow in holiness together, encourage and support one another in the Christian life, and challenge one another when needed. I moved into a house with five other young women.

To live in a community house is a wonderful grace, because you discover all kinds of things about yourself that you never wanted to know! At this point in my life I had a certain image of myself: I was basically a really good person—kind, charitable, friendly, generous, smart, holy... and very humble. But after a few months of living together, we began to experience the difficulties in relationships that any group of people in close quarters will experience. There was one person in particu-

lar, named Bobbie, whom I had trouble getting along with. I seemed to irritate her, and we kept getting into arguments and getting irritated at each other.

My initial response was, “I’m going to work harder at being kind and loving. I’m going to do better.” But I found that the more I tried, the more I failed. I began to see in myself patterns of pride, judgmentalism, a critical spirit, jealousy, self-love and self-pity that I hadn’t even seen before. I would go to confession and try to change, but I couldn’t manage to do so. Over time, I got more and more frustrated and downhearted. I began to think that maybe striving for holiness wasn’t for me; it was just too hard.

One day, when I was overwhelmed with discouragement, I shared my troubles with another sister in the house. Her response surprised me. She simply said, “Mary, I think God has you exactly where he wants you to be.” The Lord used this simple word to pierce me to the heart. I suddenly realized that the Lord knew everything about my sins and failures, and none of it was a surprise to him. Moreover, none of it was a problem to him, because he had already given his life for me and for all my sins on the cross! At one and the same moment I saw my own absolute unworthiness and God’s absolutely immense and unconditional love for me. He loved me exactly as I was, in my total poverty and helplessness. I understood that the Lord had allowed me to experience my own inability to attain anything good on my own. There was nothing I could do or needed to do to earn his favor. All is by his grace alone.

From that time onward, my life turned upside-down! It was no longer about me trying by my own efforts to be a good person, to please God, to find fulfillment—what you might call “white-knuckle Christianity”. Instead it was the Holy Spirit at work in me, and my simply yielding to him, giving him the deepest possible yes, every moment of every day. I was no longer in the driver’s seat of my life. Jesus was in the driver’s seat, and I was going along for the ride. There was freedom from the sense of failure and guilt that had been plaguing me. There was a new depth of peace and joy that I had never experienced before. I began to see that there was something much more than I thought or understood to the Christian life—it is an entirely new life that God has poured out freely. I began to understand the glorious majesty of Jesus in a way I had never

known before, and to experience God really changing me through the truth he was revealing. The old self, in bondage to sin, is truly dead; I have truly been crucified with him, and raised up with him to new life. The Holy Spirit is alive and active in me; I just need to become more aware and attentive to him. I thought, “How can it be that the gospel is such good news and so few people seem to know it?!”

In the house where I lived, Bobbie was experiencing her own transformation. Each time we had a conflict, even if we both felt very upset we would say a prayer together and ask the Lord for help. We each made a declaration in faith: my sister is not my enemy, it’s the evil one who is the enemy who is seeking to tear apart and divide the body of Christ. We would humble ourselves to ask forgiveness and we gave forgiveness when needed. And the Lord worked so powerfully that over time, we became close friends. To this day, Bobbie is a dear friend, and we are both so grateful for the struggles in our relationship which brought us to a deeper dependence on the Lord.

Several years later, the Lord led me to continue my studies and get a doctorate in biblical theology. He also led me to consecrate my life totally to him as a celibate lay woman living in the world. I had the privilege of making this vow in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, in the very place where, according to tradition, stood the cross on which Jesus gave his life in the eternal spousal covenant with us, his bride.

I served in leadership in Mother of God Community for several years, and then became a professor of Scripture in a seminary. It is a joy and privilege to teach young men preparing for the priesthood, as well as men preparing for the diaconate and lay students preparing for ministry in the Church and the world. It’s hard to believe that I actually get paid for spending most of the day every day in the Word of God!

Seven years ago, the Lord took me on a completely new and unexpected adventure. It began when three of my friends, independently of each other, said to me, “You should meet Randy Clark.” I had heard of Randy Clark, a Protestant healing evangelist, but didn’t know anything about him. But when these three people kept insisting that I should meet him, I began to think that maybe the Lord was trying to tell me something. So I signed up for a weekend conference organized by Randy Clark. At this conference, it was as if the heavens were opened above us.

There were amazing physical healings. There were spiritual healings, conversions, prophecies, God breaking into people's lives in a powerful way, God's presence being so powerfully manifested in our midst. It was a weekend of living in the supernatural. I came away from that weekend with a deep conviction in my heart: God wants this in the Catholic Church. This is part of our heritage. This manifestation of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit is meant to be a normal part of the life of the Church.

I contacted Randy through a friend, and he agreed to schedule a one-hour meeting with me. For this one-hour meeting I had to buy a plane ticket and travel to another state. I had never done anything so extravagant, but I knew I had to do it in obedience to the Lord. We had a good meeting, but more importantly, Randy invited me to come on one of his mission trips to Brazil. His organization, Global Awakening, takes large teams of people on mission to countries all over the world.

In the meantime, at the seminary where I teach, I had a sabbatical semester coming up. A sabbatical is time for a professor to take a break from teaching to allow for more in-depth research in their field of interest. As I prayed about what topic to research, I knew the Lord wanted me to study healing—supernatural, divine healing. And I knew the Lord wanted me not just to read books about healing, but to actually witness his healing. So during that semester, I went on a two-week mission to São Paulo, Brazil, with Randy Clark.

It was two weeks of living in the supernatural. Each evening our team would go to a different church (Baptist, Evangelical, neo-charismatic), which would be packed with people. Many of those who came to the service had not been to church in years, if ever. They had been invited by their friends because they knew there would be healings and miracles. There was praise and worship, an inspiring sermon that stirred up faith, then testimonies, and finally prayer for physical healings and for deliverance from evil spirits and addictions. The team would spend hours praying over individuals for healing of specific conditions. There were many healings, some of them extraordinary. A young woman in a wheelchair, in great pain because of a degenerative hip disease, was able to get out of her chair and walk without pain. A young man walking on crutches, with metal rods and screws implanted in his ankle because of a

motorcycle accident, came forward holding his crutches in the air and jumping up and down to show that he had no more pain. Tumors disappeared. Deaf ears were opened and blind eyes began to see.

But the high point of each service was toward the end, when there was an invitation for all those who had never done so to come forward and publicly invite Jesus into their life as Lord and Savior. Now that they had seen Jesus do miracles, they could not deny that he is alive! And he desires to come into every person's life with his healing, transforming power. It was made clear to everyone that this was no mere symbolic gesture: it was a big decision with lifelong consequence – the best decision anyone could ever make. Slowly people would begin to forward, some hesitantly and some enthusiastically, many in tears. At first a trickle and then a dozen, 50, 100 or 200 people would come to the front. The speaker would lead them in a simple prayer, repenting for sin and inviting Jesus to come and reign in their lives. It was evident that the Holy Spirit was touching them in dramatic ways, like a replay of the day of Pentecost. In this way I saw firsthand the powerful evangelistic power of signs and wonders. It was like living in the Acts of the Apostles.

By the end of this mission, I knew that “I could not but speak of what I had seen and heard” (cf. Acts 4:20). This experience of seeing the Lord so powerfully active, seeing him do so many healings before my eyes in order to reach the lost, had changed me. I knew also that I had to act on what I had seen and heard. I had to pray for healings and take risks in faith as I had seen Randy and the team do. As it happened, I was a speaker at a Catholic conference in Qatar immediately after the Brazil mission. I knew that I had to not only talk about healing, but also pray for healing with expectant faith. It was scary. What if I prayed for healing in front of this audience of 3000 people, and nothing happened? But I had to obey the Lord. So at that conference, I gave a talk to stir up faith and I spoke of some of the healings I had witnessed. Then I prayed for healing of some specific conditions, and led the audience in simple prayers like this: “Ears, be opened in the name of Jesus!”

I had to leave the stage quickly so that the next speaker could begin. To my surprise, the next speaker came up to the podium in tears. He told the audience, “I’ve had hearing loss in my left ear for several months, ever since I was hit with a soccer ball. I was really worried about it. But

when you prayed, ‘Ears, be opened in the name of Jesus’, my ear popped open and now I can hear clearly!” What a sign of the faithfulness of the Lord.

After this mission I studied in depth what Scripture reveals about healing, especially in the gospels, and the place of healing in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, the lives of the saints, and Catholic tradition. It became more and more clear that throughout history, healings, miracles, signs and wonders have been a regular part of the life of the Church, especially in periods of intense evangelization. In short, the supernatural is the normal Christian life! It is only our modern era, jaded as it is by the Enlightenment, skepticism, and secularization, that regards healings and miracles as something to be expected very rarely, if ever. I put the results of this study and experience in my book, *Healing*. One of the most important things I learned is that the Lord loves to heal far more often than we think, and he loves to use ordinary people to do it. In fact, he has given all his disciples this instruction: “Heal the sick, and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10:9).

I’ll share with you just one of the many healings I have witnessed. A few weeks ago, I decided to go to the downtown area of my town, Ypsilanti, with no other agenda than to pray with someone who needed healing. I prayed, “Lord, please show me what you want to heal,” and what I thought he said was “left ankle.” So I drove downtown, parked my car, and started walking around. I saw an elderly, heavy-set woman walking with a cane, slowly and with great difficulty. Since I’m an introverted person, I had to work up my courage to approach and talk to her, but I went up to her and said, “It looks like it’s painful for you to walk.” She was very friendly and said, “Oh yes, a lot of pain.” I said, “This may sound strange, but I think the Lord sent me here because he wants to heal someone’s ankle.” She replied, “It’s not my ankle, it’s my knees!” I said, “I think that’s close enough!” I’ve learned by experience that we don’t always hear the Lord clearly, but he works anyway, in spite of our mistakes. I told her that I’ve often seen Jesus heal people, and asked if I could pray for her knees. She was willing, but said she really didn’t think God would heal her, because her knee problems were partly her fault, from overeating. I explained that God doesn’t heal people because they’re worthy. Rather, he heals the unworthy! Psalm 41 says,

“O Lord, heal me, for I have sinned against you!” It doesn’t say, “O Lord, heal me, because I’ve done well, I deserve it.”

Her name was Gwen. So I prayed for Gwen first to receive God’s unconditional love. I invited her to ask God’s forgiveness for over-indulgence in food and any ways she had mistreated her body, and to believe in faith that she was forgiven through the blood of Jesus. Then I prayed for her knees. I asked her to stand up and test them. She said, “That’s strange. Usually if I stand up they hurt.” I encouraged her to try walking without her cane. Within a couple of minutes, she was holding her cane in the air and saying, “There’s no pain. This is a miracle! It’s a miracle!” After this I walked around with Gwen, then we sat on a bench and spoke about the love of God. I learned that she had walked all the way from her nursing home up the road in the sweltering heat, in pain, just to buy a lemonade for a woman working in a used-goods store. How beautiful that the Lord had so much more for Gwen that day! I believe that the Lord wants his children to have these kinds of encounters frequently, in which we tell people the good news that the kingdom is here because the King is here, and they can experience for themselves that Jesus is truly alive. I thank God for his mercies which are new every morning, and for all he has done in my life!

*I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;  
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.*  
(Psalm 104:33)