

Stepping on the Serpent: The Journey of Trust with Mary

Questions for Reflection

Introduction

1. How do you imagine your life? In what ways is life a journey for you?
2. Who are the companions along your journey of life? What tools do you use for your journey?
3. How prepared are you for the surprises of the journey?
4. What does the prayer "Jesus, I trust in You" mean to you at the beginning of the journey? What memories or emotions accompany this prayer?

Chapter 1: Steps of Trust into the Future

1. What plans has God had for you in the past, and have you accepted them? What plans do you think He has for your future?
2. What are the crosses and sufferings the Lord is asking you to bear right now?
3. Are you willing to walk the path of trust each day with Mary? How can you concretely begin the journey with her today?
4. How often do you receive the Sacraments, particularly Confession and the Eucharist? How can the Sacraments help you participate in the Paschal Mystery in your everyday life through trust?

Chapter 2: Foreseeing Our Path: Trusting in Divine Providence

1. Do you find yourself anxiously trying to fix things yourself without asking for the help of God's grace? In what areas of your life? Do you trust in God the Father to provide in all ways?
2. Are you willing, like John, to accept Mary into your life (see Jn 19:27)? Do you ask for her to watch over you in her maternal providence? Do you entrust your cares and concerns to her daily?
3. How is Jesus' statement, "**All creatures, whether they know it or not, and whether they want to or not, always fulfill My will**" (*Diary*, 586) reflected in your own life? Can you name specific examples?
4. What specific anxieties might you have that keep you from fully trusting in God? How can you grow in trust while suffering from these anxieties?

Chapter 3: What Is Trust? Taking the First Step

1. Having reviewed the definitions of trust, how would you define trust in your life?
2. What does it mean to be trustworthy? Why do people trust in you?
3. Who are the people that you trust? Why do you trust them?
4. What are your own limitations and sins? To whom do you turn in times of need and difficulty?
5. Do you accept yourself as you are and not as you want yourself to be? What obstacles prevent this acceptance of the Father's love for you as you are?

6. Do you trust that the Father can transform you into a saint by the power of His Mercy? How can this happen?
7. How can you be vulnerable with others and before God to create bonds of trust and intimacy?

Chapter 4: Trust Is a Journey: Agreeing on the Destination

1. Who is your favorite saint?
2. Have you ever seriously considered becoming a saint? Why or why not?
3. Is being worthy of entering Heaven a personal goal in your life? What are your priorities in life, and should they be reordered?
4. How do you define happiness? What is your heartfelt reaction to the reality that true, ultimate happiness is sharing in the life of the Triune God? What do you imagine that to be like?
5. How does your trust in God manifest itself in obedience to the Word of God in your life?

Chapter 5: Trust Is the Key to Heaven

1. What role do the intellect, will, and emotions play in your own life? In what ways do you experience harmony or disharmony within yourself?
2. What role does dialogue play in your human relationships? How does the dialogue of love between the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit manifest in your life?
3. How can you empty yourself in prayer of all the distractions and anxieties of life? How can you recognize the Word spoken by the Father in the silence of the Holy Spirit?
4. Do you focus too much on *bios*, or is *zoe* your goal in life? How so?

Chapter 6: Stepping on the Serpent of Acedia

1. When do you tend to trust in yourself and your own experiences? When do you trust others? How do you place your trust in the Word of God in your daily life?
2. How strong is your desire to have a relationship with God? How does this desire manifest itself?
3. In what ways do you have a daily time to foster that relationship with God through communion and dialogue?
4. In what ways could you say that you are “fulfilled”? In what ways do you desire “something more”?

Chapter 7: Stung by the Serpent of Distrust

1. In what ways is distrust the root of sin?
2. How may God be moving you to trust in Him working through others (your spouse, coworkers, etc.)?
3. What are the things or who are the people in whom you place your trust rather than in God?
4. What does it mean to you that the Father’s intention is to lead you to salvation? What does salvation mean to you?
5. How can you better remember the Father’s intention of bringing you to Heaven when things seem to be going wrong?

6. What are the ways that Satan seeks to instill distrust in your heart? How can you counteract this?

Chapter 8: Vengeful or Good Father?

1. How do you react when you fall into sin? What emotions fill your heart? What steps can you take to arise after having fallen?
2. Do you see God as your merciful Father, or do you fear His judgment?
3. How frequently do you receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
4. How aware are you of your own sinful behavior? Are you sometimes able to anticipate and stop short of doing it?
5. Do you make an Examination of Conscience a regular part of your day?

Chapter 9: Misery and Mercy

1. In what ways can you remain humble before the Lord and seek His mercy?
2. What is your reaction to your own misery — that is, to your own concupiscence or fallen state? How do you deal with it?
3. How can you trust in His mercy amid your own misery?
4. In what ways do you pretend to be better before God than you are and attempt to avoid the intimacy of Him knowing you in your sinfulness?
5. What are the motives for your practices of prayer or other devotions?
6. When do you most feel despair and hopelessness? What do you do in the face of such emotions so that they don't cause you to drown amid the storm?

Chapter 10: Mary, Our Model of Trust

1. How can you relate to the suffering Mary endured in her life? How is she a model for you?
2. In what ways did wisdom and trust influence the vastly different decisions Mary made compared to Eve? How can you obtain that same wisdom so as to trust as Mary did? Where do you need wisdom in your life?
3. How do you discern the Father's will in your life? How often do you seek to discern His will?
4. In what ways do you say "amen" to the Father's will? Where do you still fail to say "amen?"

Chapter 11: The Challenges of Trusting like Mary

1. What were some of Mary's challenges along the path of trust?
2. How do you see your own role in the salvation of souls? For whom do you feel responsible?
3. How often do you praise God? For what do you praise God? For what do you have difficulty praising Him?
4. In what ways are you pusillanimous or magnanimous?
5. In what ways does the Father empty you? How does He seek to fill you with His blessings?

Chapter 12: The Infant Jesus: Healing Our Distrust

1. What is your reaction to Jesus as an infant in the manger? How can you permit Him to draw near to you and snuggle next to your Heart? In what ways does He want you to draw near to His Heart?
2. In what ways did Mary give her Son to others from His infancy to the Cross? How might you imitate her?
3. In what ways are you like Martha or Mary or both (see Lk 10:38-42)? When do you sense the Lord might be inviting you to let go of work to simply rest at His feet to receive His Love?
4. When do you experience boredom in your life? In what ways might you tire of receiving God's love and close your heart because you want to "do something else"?

Chapter 13: Trusting like a Child: Embraced by the Father

1. In what ways do you turn away or hide from the Father when you sin?
2. What are the wounds that keep you from embracing the Father or others in your life?
3. When are you afraid to go directly to the Father? How often do you turn to Mary as your Mother and seek her intercession?
4. In what ways have you felt the comfort of Mary's presence? When do you need her presence the most in your life?
5. In what ways do you find it easy or difficult to accept your own poverty (sinfulness, weaknesses, or even economic poverty)? Are you able to extend that acceptance to others in their poverty?

Chapter 14: Trust Amid Poverty

1. How does Jesus' injunction to seek first the Kingdom of God manifest itself in your life?
2. When did you ever feel you "did enough" for God? How do you desire to receive and give "more" for the greater glory of God?
3. How aware are you of Jesus entrusting Himself entirely to you in each Holy Communion? How deliberate are you in entrusting yourself and everything in your life into His hands?
4. Who is the one "master" whom you serve? Are there competing "masters"?
5. In what ways do you entrust yourself to your spouse and your family? What are some ways in which you still hold back, not loving them as Jesus has loved you?

Chapter 15: Trust as the Door of Faith

1. How real is Jesus' power over sin, death, and suffering to you in your daily life? Are the miracles of the Gospel only past events, or do you believe that God's power is at work even today? Where do you see it at work?
2. How is the Lord asking you to have radical trust like Abraham? What is your "Isaac" that He asks you to entrust to Him?
3. In what ways is Mary a woman of hope? Where do you need such hope in your life, and how can you imitate her?
4. When does it seem that the wine — the *joie de vivre* — runs dry in life? To whom do you turn for help in those moments? How often do you bring those empty jars to the Lord to be filled with His mercy?

5. For what blessings are you grateful in your life? How often do you give thanks to God each day? Do the Father's blessings lead you to rejoice in the goodness of God Himself?

Chapter 16: Trust and Salvation

1. What kind of faith amazes Jesus? How would you describe your faith?
2. What is the healing that you seek from the Lord? How does faith itself provide healing in your life?
3. How do you experience Jesus' love and mercy in relation to your misery? How often do you seek His healing when faced with suffering?
4. What is the greatest evil in your life? Why is sin the greatest evil?
5. In what ways is Mary inviting you to "do whatever He tells you"?

Chapter 17: Walking on Water

1. When are the times in your life when you had to walk on water? Who walked with you?
2. What did you focus upon in those difficult times? What kept you steady as you took steps of trust? Like Peter, have you ever been distracted and fallen into fear, taking your eyes off Jesus?
3. When has Jesus seemed to be asleep in your "boat"? What is your reaction to Him?
4. In what ways do you value the Church as the "boat" in your life? In what ways do you need to leave the false "boat" of your securities to walk on water toward Jesus?

Chapter 18: Calming the Storm

1. In what ways do you experience wonder and awe before the Lord? How much time do you spend simply adoring Him, admiring His majesty and love? What does it mean to truly know the Lord?
2. Are you aware of Jesus dwelling deep within you through Baptism and faith? What difference does His presence make?
3. How can you trust Jesus, especially amid the storms in your life? How often do you thank and adore Him, even amid the storm?
4. Have you ever felt Mary's presence amid a storm? How has she helped you walk upon the stormy waters toward her Son?

Chapter 19: The Zenith of Trust

1. When you ask the Father for help in time of trouble, has He ever not responded? Did He respond in a way you did not intend? When has He seemingly not solved problems?
2. Have you ever turned away from the Father when He doesn't seem to answer your prayers or His answers are not what you expect?
3. In what ways do you sin in choosing life in this passing world over death with Christ and new life with God?
4. What is the connection between Jesus' suffering and His Resurrection? How is suffering connected to love, and why is suffering necessary? In your own life, how does suffering lead you to new life?
5. When you ponder the Passion of Christ, how do you see the role of the serpent? How do you see his role in the suffering in your own life?

Chapter 20: Crucified Trust

1. How strongly do you believe that whatever crosses and sufferings we have in this life will pale in comparison to the glory of Heaven?
2. How do you already experience the new life of the resurrection even when you're at the Cross?
3. How often do you meditate upon the Passion of Christ? What is your emotional reaction when faced with the crucified Body of Jesus, wounded by your sins? How aware are you of His love, which is stronger than sin and death?
4. How willing are you to suffer crosses voluntarily for love of Jesus? What are the crosses in your life?
5. How has Jesus loved you? In what ways do you love others as He has loved you?
6. What does the pierced Heart of Jesus mean to you?

Chapter 21: Trust at the Cross with Our Lady

1. What would it be like for you to stand at the foot of the Cross with Mary? How would you feel?
2. Are you willing to stay there at Calvary, or do you want to flee as did the Apostles?
3. Have you ever experienced contradiction between what you believe and what you experience? How does Mary help you to stand in faith, even when it seems that God's promises aren't true?
4. How can you "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7) in moments of darkness?

Chapter 22: Waiting in Trust for the Answer

1. How can you regularly find time to be with Jesus (especially in the Blessed Sacrament) and fix the eyes of your soul upon Jesus?
2. How do self-seeking and self-giving manifest themselves in your life?
3. What does it mean that the Father will fulfill His promises in His own way and in His own time?
4. How are impatience, anger, bitterness, and frustration revealed in your life when you don't get your way?
5. What are pride and meekness, and how do they manifest themselves in your life?

Chapter 23: Trust Amid Abandonment

1. Has abandonment been a factor in your life? What is it like when you feel abandoned?
2. What does it mean to entrust yourself into the Father's hands even amid abandonment? How does such trust help? What do Jesus' words, "Into your hands, Father, I commend my spirit" (see Lk 23:46) mean to you?
3. In what ways have you seen the Father draw good out of evil and suffering?
4. What is it like to gaze upon Jesus after having sinned? What do you expect His reaction to be?
5. How often do you shed tears for your sins like Peter?
6. Have you experienced Mary's presence during the Mass or in Adoration? What difference can Mary make for you in how you understand this Sacrament?

Chapter 24: The Reward of Trust

1. What is the “will” you think of when you say, “Thy will be done?” What adjectives would you use to describe the Father’s “will”?
2. In what ways are you a slave to sin?
3. How is the difference between suffering in slavery to sin and suffering for Christ experienced in your life?
4. In what circumstances have you been aware of the surpassing power of God in the Holy Spirit?
5. How do you embrace the Cross? How can you willingly accept suffering so as to unite with Jesus and so prepare to share in his glory? How often do you offer your sufferings to the Father with Jesus?

Chapter 25: Trust as Spiritual Worship

1. In what ways do you participate in spiritual worship in your daily life?
2. Is your participation at Mass primarily exterior? In what ways can you deepen your interior participation in the self-sacrifice of Christ on Calvary at Mass?
3. What parts of your heart and life do you need to be transformed by the Holy Spirit at Mass?
4. What role does gratitude play in your life and worship? How can your entire life become a “Eucharist” or thanksgiving to the Father?
5. How do you keep the Sabbath holy?

Chapter 26: The Courage to Trust

1. What are the consequences of trust and distrust in your own life? When does trust require courage, and where do you find that courage?
2. How willing are you to obey the Father’s will and align your will with His at each moment?
3. What or whom do you love and not count the cost? Where do you still count the cost?
4. How do you feel about the possibility of being a martyr and giving everything, even to the point of being willing to surrender your very life, for the Father?

Chapter 27: Trust in the Father’s Will

1. How do you listen to and discern the Father’s will?
2. How often do you consciously invite the Holy Spirit into your daily life? What areas of your life need to be touched by the Holy Spirit?
3. How capable are you of giving thanks to the Father even in adversity? In what ways can you sing your own Magnificat with Mary?

Chapter 28: The Weapon of Trust

1. How do you view the state of evil in the world and the battle for the salvation of souls today?
2. What roles do the world, the flesh, and the devil play in your life?

3. How does Satan seek to distract and attack you? Is there any pattern of evil or spiritual bondage that persists in your life?
4. Are there ways that Satan can infiltrate your home by means of TV, movies, music, internet, etc.?
5. How can you create silence in your life in order to allow you to hear the Father's whisper and feel the presence of your guardian angel?

Chapter 29: Mary, Our Help and Trust

1. What does the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart mean?
2. How can you imitate Mary's conquest of the serpent through trust, faith, hope, patience, and loyalty?
3. How do you envision the spiritual battle against evil and how will you participate?

Conclusion

1. Having journeyed through this book with Mary, how do you understand the prayer, "Jesus, I trust in You"?
2. What are some difficulties you still experience with it?
3. Where have you grown?
4. In what ways can you witness to this trust with joy and courage?
5. How can you invite others to trust and evangelize?