

## A LADYBUG ON THE CHAPEL PEW

*“How brave a ladybug must be!  
Each drop of rain is big as she.  
Can you imagine what you’d do,  
If raindrops fell as big as you?”*

Aileen Fischer

*“A ladybug sighting has been linked with luck in love, marriage, healing, and newness in life.”*

Anonymous

*“You know who must be very secure in their masculinity? Male ladybugs.”*

Jay Leno

I stumbled across this missive from January 2016.  
It is a light-hearted piece: not my usual technological tome or end-of-world fare.  
I hope you enjoy it.

In the middle of the College of the Ozarks (CofO) campus stands a beautiful native stone, cathedral-like chapel. Busloads of visitors stop by during the course of a normal semester (pre-pandemic, that is). College students built the chapel. Their love and dedication to this task is still enjoyed by those same visitors—too numerous to count—who view the exquisite interior woodwork and awe-inspiring stained-glass windows. At noon, the music of hymns played by the chapel chimes waft over campus.

(I can’t but wonder what kind of chapel today’s college and university students elsewhere throughout the country—seemingly more concerned with neo-Marxist mantras of identifying oppressors and pursuing “wokeness”—would build; if indeed, they could wrest themselves from their iPhones long enough to dirty their hands). CofO students still work!

But that is another missive.

And I promised to stay with the tenor of the piece from January 2016.

Back to the chapel.

During my days as visiting professor at CofO, I grew to love the chapel as a daily spiritual oasis and personal sanctuary.

On one particular Wednesday (January 13, 2016)—a beautiful and exceptionally warm winter day in Point Lookout, Missouri (where CofO is located)—I walked into the chapel and took my usual seat. My pew was ten rows of pews from the back, and I would sit next to the center aisle. I would sit there by myself. Alone. It was a perfect place to worship God and offer thanks for His wondrous works in my life. As usual, I would study the beautiful stained-glass portrayal of Christ positioned at the 2:00 o'clock position from my customary pew location.

I just felt closer to God there.

But on this day, as I recall, there was something different during my afternoon visit. It took several minutes before I saw it, and then it was several more minutes before I actually figured out what it was. At first, I thought it was a small knob, or a small glob of gunk on the pew.

But it was a ladybug.

I hadn't noticed it while I was praying.

A ladybug sitting on the chapel pew two rows in front of me.

I got up out of my pew seat to examine it up close to make sure.

Sure enough, it was an orange-shell, black dotted ladybug.

Most of you know by now that my mind works in a strange way. So, I began pondering to myself, "what were the mathematical odds in the vast universe of existence that I would notice a ladybug on a pew two rows in front of me in the campus chapel on a beautiful January Wednesday?"

They must be astronomical.

At the same time, the gentle voice of The Holy Spirit whispered to me in the way He sometimes will do: "Jeemes, if you knew everything there was to know about that ladybug and this church, and the juxtaposition between the two, you would know the secret of the heavens."

Wow! What a thought.

Even after all these years, I'm still not sure exactly what He meant. Was He alluding to my size insignificance—like the small ladybug—compared to the vastness of the inside of the church, let alone an omnipresent God?

Or perhaps He was referring to my all-too-human spiritual immaturity and lack of understanding, like a ladybug (I guess) compared to the infinite symbolic knowledge of the eternal?

Then a truly strange thought hit me. As a college instructor, was I little more than a ladybug facing the odds of (and swamped by) waves of student ignorance and disinterest in this world?

Was He talking about how God blessed me in even noticing the ladybug in the first place and, in the second place, my ability to mentally dwell on its

significance—and my own—in the universe? Then a sort of smug thought: after all, how many others would pass the ladybug without a second thought?

Maybe it was the sheer spiritual incongruity of a ladybug on a church pew. How many churches have pews stuffed with people who are little better than ladybugs in terms of their impact on the world around them?

Why does my human mind keep trying to make these logical and spiritual connections?

Am I the only one suffering from this disease?

I assume many of you will think I acted ridiculously with what I did next. I bent down and asked the ladybug to give me a sign of God's presence. But then it occurred to me that while people seek signs, ladybugs know signs aren't necessary. They are ladybugs and God is God. Besides, even if the ladybug confused me with Balaam, or hee-hawed like a donkey, would I have the spiritual maturity to hear what the ladybug was saying?

For all I knew, that ladybug could have been singing the most beautiful praise hymns to God in church—perhaps that's why it was there—in a ladybug language that I couldn't recognize.

“Sigh.”

Eventually, I left the ladybug there and started walking out the door. Then another thought hit. *Did I wait long enough for God to reveal His teaching regarding the ladybug? Do I ever wait long enough?*

On my way out, I noticed four more ladybugs. After opening the doors and climbing down the stone steps, I noticed two squashed ladybugs outside. I almost certainly would not have noticed them before.

What other wondrous works does God place in my path that I pass by without noticing?

The thought of the ladybug—and the gnawing sensation that I may have missed something that God was wanting to tell me—haunted me for the rest of the day. That same day I taught my first class in Modern Russian History and A History of Modern China and Japan. In both classes I used an excellent article by Peter Pomerantsev, entitled “Brave New War,” to convince the kids they are living in an age of dramatic change and, most likely, in the “gray zone” of World War III. (I allude to this article in one of my missives on “The Future of War”).

But many of my students really don't want to hear that breathtaking challenges—and opportunities—lie ahead for them during these exciting days. Nor are they, it seems to me, reassured to hear that personal closeness to God will protect them in times of vanishing dreams and strange warfare.

I can see it in their ladybug eyes.

