

The Pray More Retreat Study Guide

Overcoming the Lies of the devil by Father Anthony

Good morning, well I suppose you are the faithful remnant. Snow is pretty thick out there and I think a lot of people were worried that they might slip. If your health is at risk in the parking lot you are always welcome to come to the mass in the vigil on Saturday or just stay at home because while it's a very serious obligation we have to worship the Lord and receive His grace, at the same time He knows that He wants us to be safe and protected.

One thing that I know you know about me is that ever since I was a little boy I was fascinated by law enforcement. I still am to this very day! And one thing that you don't know about me, I'm guessing, is that I have an equal fascination with the history and the activity of the drug cartel. What? You don't have the same interests as me? You guys collect John Deere hats and those weird statues. So I study the drug cartel!

Anyway, it fascinates me. Absolutely fascinates me! So, recently I watched a documentary on the cartel in Mexico in a region called Michoacán which is the same location where most of the people in my town in the west suburbs are from. And then I watched some Hollywood action film about the cartel. And if you watch these films, this documentary and this film, and you don't have faith or you have very little faith I imagine that it's probably pretty easy to think,

“You know, nothing is going to change”.

You chop off the head and another one grows back. It's always going to be this way and all this misery that takes place in this world.

But a person of faith who looks even more closely at the situation would see that Jesus is victorious and His power is greater than the darkest things in this world including this organized crime. So, for instance, I remember studying a number of years ago this person named Jorge Valdez who was from the U.S. (well he was an immigrant to the U.S.) and he eventually became the U.S. head of operations for the Medellín Colombian Cartel.

And if you don't know anything about the history of cartels this is one of the most highly organized vicious and financially lucrative cartels in the world. They were out of Columbia. So he was, I don't know what he would be, he was the CEO of

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whatever in the U.S. of the cartel. And I think from the Medellín Cartel about 80% of the cocaine came to our country from that cartel.

So, this guy was living a great life. He was rubbing elbows with dignitaries and presidents and eventually it caught up with him. On a number of occasions I believe he was tortured and imprisoned. When he was in prison on one occasion he met somebody. He met Jesus and it absolutely changed his life.

He had this big conversion and he wanted to turn his whole life over to Christ. And so he wanted to learn more about the Lord and he worked on his PhD for his theological degree through Wheaton College. You probably know of Wheaton College. It's up in the suburbs. He eventually is released. He finishes his degree I believe and he becomes an adjunct professor at Wheaton College. He was the head of U.S. operations of the Medellín Cartel! Amazing! And now he's a professor of theology at Wheaton College.

Well, as I remember the story he converts to Catholicism and you can't have a Catholic on your theological staff at an evangelical college so he goes on to a different ministry and he worked with at risk youth on the street. Kids who were likely going into gang activity. Amazing!

God's power is greater than the darkest things in this world. He makes all things new and I think what we see in today's Gospel passage is His victory over Satan. I want to talk about that victory. I want to talk about some of the tactics and the methods that the devil uses. And then finally, some of the ways we can thwart him. You know, think ahead and get away from his traps.

Our Lord is victorious. Absolutely victorious over the power of Satan and we see Him going into the realm of Satan. So the desert itself; the desert was a symbol of lawlessness, of wildness, of sin, of darkness. He goes there moved by the Spirit of God to fast for 40 days and 40 nights. When he's at the end of his fasting the Devil tempts him in three specific ways.

He asks him, he says, "Look just turn this stone into bread."

and Jesus says, "No I won't do it".

Now there's nothing wrong in and of itself to turn a stone into bread. Because he [Jesus] multiplies loaves and fish and whatnot. But his mission was to reveal the love of the Father. And the love of the Father is a self-emptying love. It's not about

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taking. It's about emptying one's heart and one's self for the sake of the other. And so he wanted to follow the way of God the Father and not of the Devil.

The second temptation is that of power. So, in an instant he [Satan] shows him all of the kingdoms of the world and he says,

“If you worship me then you can have all this power. They will bow to you”. [Jesus says], “No, I will not do it”.

The last one is he takes him to the top of the temple. The holiest place in the world! All these faithful people coming in to sacrifice to the true God.

He [the Devil] says, “As you stand here, just let yourself fall down. If angels catch you everyone will applaud your name and give you honor”. He [Jesus] says, “No you shall not put the Lord your God to the test”.

Jesus is victorious over the temptations of the Devil. And he brings the fight. I think that's the key part. He goes into the desert. You'll remember later on in the ministry of our Lord. That he asks his apostles,

“Who do people say that I am?” Well some people say this, some people say that. “Who do you say that I am?” And Simon, son of Jonah, says, “You are the Christ”.

Jesus was amazed this was a movement of the Spirit and he says to him,

“You are Peter, not Simon, and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of the netherworld will not prevail against it”.

So, you have to imagine, here's the kingdom of darkness. Here's the kingdom of Satan and it's surrounded by gates and walls. And they will not prevail as Jesus brings the fight and smashes them down. That's the idea. He brings the fight. Jesus is victorious.

Now, of course, we realize that it's His victory not our victory but it can be part of our victory. We can enter into it. We gotta get into the car with Jesus. And that battle takes place within the realm or the battlefield of our mind and our heart because the Devil has the opportunity to whisper thoughts into our minds.

So, God wants to go into battle with the power of the spirit in our mind and in our heart so that from there we make the decisions of our lives.

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One thing that the Devil does and here's his tactic. He likes to make us think that there's only two options. Either you choose this counterfeit option; a narrow sighted thing that looks good from the outside. Or you get nothing.

Either you turn the stone into bread or you starve. Either you bow down before me or people will just stomp on you. Either you do this or you will get nothing. Either you lie, cheat and steal or you get nothing. Either you do this counterfeit thing and you won't be able to have children, you won't be able to have a future, you won't keep your job. And the list goes on.

So, he [Satan] presents what appears to be only two options. And he wants you to make a decision. Either it's getting a little or it's getting nothing at all. Well, Jesus taps us on the shoulder. Tap, tap tap. And he says,

“Well, there's a third option. I'm the third option. And what I promise you is if you follow my ways, if you live by my words and my commands I will promise you freedom that you never thought possible”.

You may have things unfold in your life that you didn't expect as a child. But despite that, if you follow my ways when you get to the end of your life, you'll look back and you'll say,

“It was completely worth it. It was completely worth it”.

Now it requires sometimes for us to not always understand His ways and we might be a little confused but we hear His prompting and we go forward. This is what the third option is. So, the Devil likes to make us think that there are only two possible options: this or nothing. God taps us on the shoulder, He says,

“No, there's a third option; infinite love, my ways”.

So, in his kind of tool box the Devil has he makes you think that there are only two choices. But he also wants to make you not look at the third option in general. So, he will confuse you and he will distract you and find ways to do that.

Here's a personal example: this week I've been pretty busy and exhausted and when I get exhausted my mind is not as clear at keeping track of all of the details of daily life. So, if you send me an email I'll try to read all of it but I will only take

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in about 85%. So, I might miss an important detail or I might forget to return phone calls or whatever it is. because I'm exhausted. My mind is tired.

So, the other day someone asked me to visit their loved one in the hospital and we had this correspondence going and it was for a specific date but I missed that. It was like three days ago they emailed me. Well, Friday night I get an email saying,

"So, we'll see you at 8:30".

So I'm thinking, that means Saturday morning. So, Saturday is a pretty busy day for a priest. I drive all the way up to the hospital. I'm looking around. I'm there early and then I become late because I can't find the person and the family.

Then I'm thinking, wait a second. So, I start reading back old emails. Oh! It's on a different day! I'm kicking myself. I'm like,

"Oh what a waste of time!"

It's not their fault. It's not necessarily my fault. Although, I feel pretty stupid. So, I'm driving back. And then, the battle's in the thought-realm. I'm thinking to myself, thoughts are formulating,

"What a waste of time. You dummy. You could have been doing other things; important things."

So, what the Devil wants you to do is not focus on the third option. He wants you to dwell on regrets of the past or dwell on fears of the future. You know what that's like.

Regrets of the past might be: oh you wasted money, the power went out and all the meat in your freezer went bad. You know, all that's gone. Whatever it is and you just dwell on it, dwell on it. And as we dwell on the future, the bad things of the future or the things of our past then we're not dialed in to hear the things of the present. Where God speaks words of inspiration, encouragement, love. Or we're not able to offer that to God a blessing and thanksgiving.

So, as these things were formulating in my head, thinking, "What a waste of time". Jesus taps me on the shoulder and says,

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“Hey! Third option. I make all things new. You’re going to have a blessed day. I’m the one that created time so if you’re worried about not getting all of your stuff done, don’t worry. You’ll get your stuff done”.

And I got my stuff done and it was filled with blessings and joys! I think this is what happens in our daily life.

Now, how do we then thwart the Devil? If that’s his tactics? There’s this ministry that’s out there in Protestant churches. It’s called Sozo ministry. It’s a healing ministry helping people who have wounds in their hearts, which we all do to some degree. To allow the Lord in, heal those wounds, so that we can have freedom. The freedom to love God even more.

So the Sozo ministry meaning, I think in Greek, “healing” consists of a model where if you’re a man you go into a room with three other men. And one guy is in charge of just praying for you. That’s it. He sits in the corner and he prays for you; that you get blessings.

The other guy in the room, he’ll have a piece of paper and he’ll write down anything you say. So that at the two hours of praying together he gives it to you and then you can remember what God said.

And then the third person, he facilitates the prayer so that you can hear the voice of God. So, they start praying for you. The Holy Spirit will come. And the first step, the first stage, is they ask the Holy Spirit, God the Father to help you identify lies that you’re holding onto. Lies about yourself.

“I’m not worthy”, “I’m useless”, “I’ve got bad faith”, “I’m dumb”, whatever it is.

Maybe it’s lies about relationships,

“You’re never going to love me”, “God doesn’t love me, He doesn’t care about me”.

Or maybe it’s lies about who God is. So, they ask the Holy Spirit to come, God reveals the lies that you’re holding onto. The next step is they ask you to ask God to tell you the truth of who you are. The truth of, as He sees it, how much He loves you and who He is and what His promises are. And then once He starts talking to you, you hear that truth.

The last stage is they say,

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“Are you ready to shut the door on the lies and then embrace the truth of who you are and set the course of your life based on that truth?”.

And then they lead you through prayers to do that. Very simple stuff. Identify the lie through Jesus. Identify the truth and then shut the door on the lie. Embrace the truth and then go forward.

Well that model is a model used in clinical psychology. Although maybe not in a spiritual way. It's a model I use in the confessional if people are interested. And when I do healing prayer and it works! They bear great fruits.

And this is what we can do as a model throughout our day. We're going about our day and we can tell something's not right. We're thinking in a way that seems just off. It's a way of thinking that seems that God's surprises are not possible. That He can't turn the impossible into the possible. That He doesn't make all things new. That He doesn't bring life and life to the full. We may not realize it but we start having these thoughts kind of filter into our mind. And then we stop and say,

“Holy Spirit, help me to identify the lie that my mind is going towards. Help me to understand the truth about the situation, about myself, about You. And help me to shut the door on the lie and embrace the truth”.

Very simple. One thing is for certain. Jesus brings the fight. He is victorious! And we can have that same victory in the battleground of our mind and our hearts so that we can be truly free. Free in His grace to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him and share that love with others.