

Pray More Advent Retreat - Transcript

Tuning in to the Thought Frequency of God

Fr. Anthony Co

Father Anthony Co: Good morning.

Crowd: Good morning.

Father Anthony Co: It's so nice to see all of you. Beautiful day. Nice to see your smiling faces. And I don't know what happened buddy. No one wanted to sit next to you. It's just these things happen, right. Anybody like movies? Anybody watch movies, a lot of movies? Okay, a handful of people, 4 people. I came from that generation that all we did was watch movies. We didn't have anything else. Or we'd play outside of course. So I love new movies. And I've noticed that one theme, one topic that makes a lot of money for the movie business is the theme of dreams. Not the sleep dreams, dreams of the heart. And so they'll begin a movie, in the first 20 minutes they'll introduce the main character, who's usually a middle aged man or woman who's kind of a grump, curmudgeon, cynical, kind of jaded by life. Doesn't want to hope too big, because if you hope too big this world's going to dash your hopes to the ground. And then something happens. If it's Disney, some kind of magical character comes in, and this magical character, or thing, or situation reawakens the dreams of the character.

By the end of this adventure, the person starts to realize that life promises life. It's a wonderful life. That their dreams can come true. And I think these stories really appeal to us because, well, we have dreams. When we were little kids, we were superheroes, you know. We'd fly around with capes, right. And then somehow, when we got middle aged, we lost our capes, and we're not quite sure what happened and we want to reclaim that somehow. And in the Christian life, dreaming is very important. It's so important. So, dreams begin in the thought, in the thoughts of the Lord. And He has all sorts of dreams for his abundance. His dreams make the impossible possible. For instance, sending Him, the second person, to take on human flesh, human life, saving those who are stuck in sin, opening the gates of paradise. And Jesus, of course, made impossible things happen. Walked on water, multiplied loaves and fish, healed the blind, the lame, the deaf. All of these different things. He made the impossible possible.

And so what happens in the life of a Christian is we try to dial in to the thought frequency of God. And what ends up happening is that he says a desire and it gets

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implanted in our hearts. And what he wants us to do is to steward that dream, that little desire. It's a little flame. To protect it, to nurture it, to fan it into a bigger one. And if we do well with the flame that we've been given, the desire, the dream, then He will increase it and increase it. We hear about this increase in today's gospel passage. It's a kingdom upgrade. You know what it's like to get an upgraded phone, right? Well, the Kingdom, whenever you hear that term, the Kingdom, it refers to Jesus and all of the treasures of heaven. So, God gives us Himself and its treasures, and if we do well with His treasures, "Alright, you did well with small matters. Okay, you're ready for big matters." And He increases the treasury within our hands. The kingdom upgrade.

What He says to us along the way is "Here's the thing. Since I'm the one who has the dreams, and you're the ones who live it out, don't reduce my dreams. Don't make them small. Like, hold on to them, and protect them. Let me show you how big they can be." So, just as a personal example in my own life, when I had my conversion, and then shortly after I felt called to the priesthood, I was really fresh, you know, fresh into the Christian life, and I began to listen to the thoughts of God. And God implanted within my heart a desire, a very unusual desire. And the desire was to be somehow instrumental in the renewal of the diocesan priesthood. Like, I didn't even know how to live the Christian life. I don't know what priests do exactly. But that desire was in my heart, and I knew I had to do something with it. So what does a 21 who doesn't know how to live the Christian life, you know, protect that desire? Well, I would talk to priests and ask them "What do you guys need so that you can be happy and healthy and strong?" Kind of daydream of what it might mean. And I'd pray about it and think about it. And then I entered seminary and I tried to learn how to just be a good Christen man. Still a work in progress, right? But trying to learn the basics.

And then I took history courses. And history courses showed me that there were times where figures would come into the church – popes, bishops, nuns, religious men, lay people, movements of the spirit –that would result in strong, healthy, diocesan priests. Parish priests, you know, on the frontlines, who were excited about the adventure of God. "What was happening?" I thought. I prayed about it. I eventually became a priest and, well, the long and short of it all is now the dream has very concrete expressions. You may not know this, but every week I have a bunch of priests come over for dinner. We meet here around 4:30 to pray Vespers Evening Prayer, and then they go over to the rectory, we crack open some bottles of wine, I throw some brats on the grill, and we have a great time.

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Sometimes it's up to about 10 people; sometimes it's small, about 3 people. And every time a person comes who's new, I tell the story of why I'm doing this. I say "This started because I have a desire to provide an atmosphere for priests to build organic friendships with other priests so they know they're not alone, to talk about the most beautiful things in life: Jesus, the spirit of God. To get renewed in laughter and joy." And I say "You know, I have one personal request as you come into this house. You may have frustrations with your own diocese." I have priests come over from Davenport also. "So you may be frustrated with things in your diocese or your own parish. Those have a place, and there's a conversation for that, but can you just leave that stuff outside? We're going to talk about other things. We're going to talk about the joy of Jesus."

And amazing things happen. It's just so cool. So, last time we had a big gathering. Father Guillermo, who's over across the river, finished his first year of their priesthood, and I wanted to honor him. So all of the priests were talking around the dinner table. I said "Hey, Father Guillermo. You know, you've been a priest one year now. What advice would you give yourself if you could go back in time in a time machine and talk to yourself the second day after ordination?" And he's a funny guy, he said something funny, I wish I could remember. And then he gave some wisdom, and all the guys were listening. I asked father... I always get this wrong, Niemeyer? Is that how you say his name? Niemeyer? Niemiller? Niemiller. Father Niemiller is a little bit older. He did the same thing. Beautiful nuggets of wisdom. Guys were leaving and saying "I haven't had a priest dinner like this before." Because usually when priests get together they talk about problem-solving, and things that frustrate them, and the works of not God, but of the evil one. Well, we don't need to talk about that stuff. And so God is telling you "Don't reduce my dream Father Anthony. It may be 8 priests now, but one day it might be 10 priests, and then 100 priests, and then 1000 priests, and then a nation of priests that you may be able to influence, to help renew their hearts, to stay focused on the most important things." And I say yes to that.

Now, here's the problem. So, we're having a conversation about how to steward the dreams of God. Beautiful topic, it makes our hearts happy, God has a dream for us. But there are problems, there's obstacles. The number one obstacle, the first obstacle, is that, now listen closely: We have problems with our butts. Anybody have a problem with their butts? But problems? You think "How does Father know I just went to the doctor?" No, I'm not talking about "butts", "butts". Anybody? "But, I'm not smart enough." "I'm too young." "I'm too old." "I'm this, I'm that." You know, I understand where that comes from. That actually is born out of pride. Those statements, we think their humility, it's born of pride. "God is not as

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powerful as my limitations.” That’s what we’re saying. And in the bible, if you look at the bible and you read the bible, it’s a series of men and women who took their... whatever they had in life, they said yes to Jesus, amazing things happened. Amazing things happened.

So, we’ve to get rid of our butts, you know, stop having problems with our butts. I like saying that, sorry. Second problem, second problem is that we don’t think Jesus or God the Father wants to talk to us. What are you talking about? I went through 12 years of Catholic education. The nuns were awesome, they loved me. They never talked about God talking to us. God wants to speak to you. How can He have us live out His dreams if He doesn’t talk to us? So, if we’re 84 years old and we’ve never heard the voice of God, we’ve got to go to class. We’ve got to ask Him to teach us to listen to His voice, to figure out if we have obstacles that are kind of drowning out the voice of God. We’ve got the figure that out.

The third is: for some reason, we look at all of the choices of our lives and we artificially make a category. One category is: The choices that God cares about. The other category is: The choices in our lives, the things that we decide, that God doesn’t care about; he’s indifferent about. And that’s not true. Every decision that we make, from whether we buy shoes with Velcro on them, to where we put our money, in a Vibrant Credit Union, or if we go to Jim’s Ribs tonight. Every decision that we make, before we were created, God set aside all the good choices He wanted us to consider so that the maximum grace and the Kingdom of God could come and pour out throughout the land. And so, when we realize that that’s true, it opens us up to new possibilities.

So, do you know where the lies that “I’m not good enough,” “I’m not smart enough,” or “God doesn’t want to talk to me,” or “He doesn’t care about certain things in my life” come from? Do you guys know where that comes from? That comes from like the deepest recesses of the pit of hell. And as Christians, we rebuke those things. We say “That is not true.” If you have those thoughts floating in your mind, that’s not of God, that’s not of the spirit; that’s the devil. You have the devil in your mind. You’ve got to get rid of it. “In the name of Jesus, get out.” Now, the first place that we start is we rebuke those things, and we declare the truth of what God says. And so this is the interactive part of the homily, okay. I’m going to ask you a series of questions, and if you agree with these statements, it doesn’t really matter if you feel the truth of these statements. We agree with the truth and we start from there. If you agree with these statements, when I say “amen”, you say “amen”. Got it? Well, let me start hear it first off. The women. Alright, “amen” women. Amen.

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Crowd: Amen.

Father Anthony Co: The men, “amen”.

Crowd: Amen.

Father Anthony Co: Amen. There’s more manly men on this side than this side for whatever reason. Okay. So here’s the question: God has a beautiful plan for the choices that we make here at St. Mary’s Catholic parish to spread the Kingdom of God through us. Amen.

Crowd: Amen.

Father Anthony Co: Amen. God wants to speak to us as a parish, so that we can make the impossible possible. But He’ll do it through us. The impossible possible. Amen.

Crowd: Amen.

Father Anthony Co: Amen. God cares about every choice that we make here as a family, and every choice that we make He cares about and it’s important for His Kingdom. Amen.

Crowd: Amen.

Father Anthony Co: Amen. That’s awesome. You guys are amazing. Thanks for playing my game here. That was the easy part, because we can hide behind numbers of people, you know. But when it becomes the first person singular, then we get scared and weirded out. So we’re going to do this again, but I’m going to say “Me”, and that “me” is you. God is going to use me to make the impossible possible in this world. Amen.

Crowd: Amen.

Father Anthony Co: Amen. God is going to speak His dreams into my mind and my heart. Sometimes when I’m awake, sometimes when I’m asleep, sometimes through visions, sometimes through scripture, sometimes through people who love me, as He implants desires in my heart to follow His ways. Amen.

Crowd: Amen.

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Father Anthony Co: Amen. Every choice that I make in my life has been set aside for a beautiful purpose, and God wants me to think about that, and pray about that, and discern that, because they matter. Amen.

Crowd: Amen.

Father Anthony Co: Amen. It's hard to get over those obstacles, because I know many people take years to struggle with it. And the limitation is the human heart. When we say "God, you can't do that." He's not going to force us. He's not going to do it. That's the beginning. And you might be thinking "Well, then what's the how-to Father? Like, what do we do next? Let's say we overcome those humps." In your goal tonight, put a guide to discern the voice of God." Maybe you're at a point in your life where you're like "You know, I thought I heard God's voice, and now I think He's changing directions, or I'm confused." When that happens, you go back to basics. Refer to that guide. In the guide, you'll hear about how God plants desires in our hearts, that we have to be radically detached from our agendas so as to hear God's dreams, which are way better than anything we can conceive of, that we can only succeed when we listen. That God cares about our hearts, and making us to be a part of His wonderful plan.

Today's gospel is about kingdom upgrades. We do well with what's put before us, we protect the desire, we protect the flame, and it will grow and grow and grow. And you know what? Think about St. Francis. Think about all of the hospitals, and the nursing homes, and whatever named after St. Francis. You know, here he was a thousand years ago or so, this poor beggar who just yes to Jesus. And you know what's interesting? He got even kicked out of his own order. And so the successes of this world do not necessarily look like the success of God's plan. But he had lasting legacy of abundance and blessing. One man saying yes. A dreamer. And God will make us dreamers, dreamers of His mind, His heart, and His plan for this place.